

PARENTAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES:  
HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON EVERYDAY PARENTING  
OCCUPATIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Chetna Sethi: Parental Decision-Making Processes:  
Historical and Socio-Cultural Influences on Everyday Parenting Occupations  
(Under the direction of Brian Boyd)

Within occupational science, most of the research related to families has focused on family routines or rituals and parenting as a co-occupation. The descriptive nature of these inquiries has articulated the “what” and “who” related to parenting occupations with much less attention to the “how” and “why”. In considering parenting as a relational role rather than an occupation (or co-occupation), the process behind everyday parental decision-making is explored in this study. Guided by the principles of life course sociology and the transactional perspective on occupation, this study captures the social, cultural, historical, and temporal influences on everyday parenting practices. In keeping with the constructivist Grounded Theory approach, relevant conceptualizations of family functioning, such as family systems theory, social information processing, and coercive parenting, along with known diversities in parenting practices based on gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity, are acknowledged as sensitizing concepts that guided data collection. Qualitative data collection methods and analysis led to the construction of a conceptual framework of the everyday decision-making strategies mothers use to address their child’s behavioral challenges. The emergent framework proposes that mothers’ responses in diverse settings are best understood as transactional relationships among the mother’s historical context, challenges encountered in the present moment, and predispositions for ways to act.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CAD	Cumulative advantage/disadvantage
CHIP	Children's Health Improvement Program
OS	Occupational science
SES	Socio-economic status
TPFD	Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

A mother's response to her child's behavior is influenced by many factors. For example, her decisions about parenting will not only be influenced by her cultural understanding of what parenting *should* look like, but also, her memories of being parented. In addition, the social structure and support the mother has for parenting are likely to inform parental decision-making, from nurturing family members acting as a positive influence to an unsafe neighborhood perhaps negatively influencing parenting decisions. The current research that has focused primarily on descriptions of parenting has largely ignored the processes and decision-making behind parenting practices. Many of these studies have described the "who" and the "what" of parenting practices, but have paid much less attention to the "how" and the "why".

Research on families within the broader fields of sociology and psychology has most often focused on "the family" as a thing-like entity that can be objectified and studied (Morgan, 2011). The original conceptions of the heteronormative family with a mother, father and their children, however, is now the minority. In addition, we also know that existing theories about families are somewhat disjointed from the theories families actually live by (Daly, 2003). There is much we do not know about families, and much that we continue to strive to understand. Occupational science (OS) has been no different in this endeavor. OS scholars have attempted to study and understand family occupations to build scholarship in the area as well as to inform pediatric occupational therapy practice. Occupational scientists have thus attempted to study family occupations through the study of family routines and rituals. Although not directly

defined as “parenting”, most studies related to family routines have focused on the parents’ perspectives of the occupations the family engages in; family routines can thus be used as a proxy for parenting occupations. As stated above, these studies describe what parents *do*, but do not explore *why* or *how* parents decide what they do.

Parenting occupations also have been studied primarily as co-occupations (Pierce, 2003; Esdaile & Olson, 2004). According to Pierce (2003), “co-occupations are the most highly interactive types of occupation, in which the occupational experiences of the individuals involved simply could not occur without the interactive responses of the other person or persons with whom the occupations are being experienced.... They are a synchronous back and forth between the occupational experiences of the individuals involved, the action of one shaping the action of the other in a close match.” (p. 199). Although the proponents of co-occupation have since conceded that mothering can take place in a situation where no in-person back and forth is taking place, this definition is an incomplete depiction of parenting or mothering in two ways. First, mothering is described here as an occupation rather than a relational role that is fulfilled by many occupations. Second, this definition relies heavily on the bidirectional influences between parent and child, ignoring the transactional experience.

Relevant literature related to intergenerational transmission of parenting practices has provided evidence that parenting practices are likely transmitted from one generation to the next (Caspi & Elder, 1988; Conger, Schofield, & Neppl, 2012). However, most of this literature has been focused on the intergenerational transmission of specific maladaptive or negative parenting practices, such as spanking or corporal punishment and attitudes towards the same (Bower-Russa, 2005; Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003). These studies typically explore child maltreatment, previous physical and/or sexual abuse (Conger, Schofield, Neppl, &

Merrick, 2013; Dixon, Browne, & Hamilton-Giachrists, 2009), breaking the cycle of violence (Dixon et al., 2009), and preventing violence or abuse. Understanding the degree to which parents of young children with behavior problems use intergenerational knowledge (i.e., knowledge transmitted from their own parents / childhood experiences) to manage the “everyday” parenting decisions is missing from the literature. By understanding how parents handle everyday / routine interactions, it will shed light on how these situations do or don’t escalate into aforementioned maladaptive parent-child interactions.

Previous research also has established that intergenerational transmission is not absolute; rather it depends on multiple situational factors. Some of these factors include attitudes towards parenting, socio-economic status (SES), parental mental health, substance abuse, and the presence of a nurturing partner (Conger et al., 2013; Jaffee et al., 2013). Systems theorists also support the notion that individuals can form mutually beneficial relationships with their environments, which can in turn translate into positive or negative parenting behaviors (Belsky, 1984; Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Thus, determining the parent-identified situational factors that influence this intergenerational transmission can provide a holistic view of the situation and create a place for early intervention.

### **Purpose of Study**

The current research on parenting within occupational science has focused on describing parenting occupations. The contribution of this research is expected to increase the understanding of the processes involved in everyday interactions between mothers and their typically developing children rather than simply describing parenting occupations. Thus, the broad research question explored in this study is:

What are the decision-making processes mothers employ to negotiate the everyday interaction with their young children when behavioral challenges arise? The sub-questions are:

- a. How are the negotiations of everyday interactions similar to or different from those in the parent's family of origin?
- b. What are the parent-identified situational factors leading to these similarities and/or differences?

The contribution of the current research will be significant because it has led to the development of a conceptual framework of the processes involved in everyday parental decision-making. For example, a parent being spanked as a child (i.e. a past intergenerational knowledge / experience) could contribute to a negative response from that parent following their child's tantrum; however, current parent-identified situational factors, such as poor sleep contributing to a parent's irritability, may increase the likelihood of a negative response occurring.

Alternatively, the parent may choose to employ techniques learned at a parent-training seminar (another example of a situational factor); perhaps then leading the parent to rely less on intergenerational knowledge. Furthermore, extant literature on factors influencing parenting practices has considered parent-child relationships as bidirectional interactions. As such, the exploration of the historical, social and cultural context, or the family situation as a whole has been minimal. The conceptual framework that has emerged from this research is the Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making.

## **Frames of Reference**

Guided by the principles of the transactional perspective (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006) and life course sociology (Elder, 1998), this study aims to capture the social, cultural, historical, and temporal influences on everyday parenting practices.

**Transactional perspective on occupation.** Within occupational science, the focus of the study of occupation is closely tied to self-action. In many instances, the definition has been extended to include inter-action, a reciprocal engagement so to speak, between an individual and

his or her environment or another individual. Dickie et al. (2006) defined self-action as based on the notion of a single, unitary agent whose action originates solely from within. They also suggested that inter-action implies separate entities coming together in a related action originated by one or the other or both. Inspired by symbolic interactionism and the pragmatist traditions of John Dewey, these authors have critiqued the emphasis on individualism and proposed a transactional perspective. The philosophical tradition of the transactional perspective, known as pragmatism, dates back to the 1870s. This tradition continued with the teachings of American pragmatists Charles Sanders Peirce and William James at Harvard University in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Building on the work of Peirce and James, George Mead extended pragmatist ideas and served as one of the key originators of symbolic interactionism (Hickman, 1998). As a sociological perspective, symbolic interactionism considers individuals to be co-constructors within society. That is, people interpret their world from others' responses to their actions and based on those interpretations, they act again (Nayar, 2012). Mead and John Dewey worked together at the Chicago School of Pragmatism, which Dewey founded at the University of Chicago; in 1905, he directed another pragmatism center at Columbia University. Dewey was and continues to be known as the premier American pragmatist philosopher (Hickman, 1998) on the basis of whom Dickie and her colleagues have described the transactional perspective on occupation.

The transactional perspective overcomes the boundaries between person and environment, and between past, present, and future (Cutchin & Dickie, 2013). The emphasis is on going beyond the individual to encompass social, cultural, physical, spatial and temporal environments.

In addition, habits, which are the building blocks of occupations, are considered as the



acquired predispositions or ways to respond to situations (Cutchin & Dickie, 2012). Through the use of habits and habit repertoires, which have been acquired through our oneness with culture, it is believed that we “functionally coordinate” with our environments when “problematic situations arise”. A transactional view of habits serves to unify individual, social and material experience (Cutchin, 2007). Habits, according to this transactional view, are not only private behavioral patterns but also heritable interpretive structures such as symbol systems, stories, beliefs, myths, metaphors, virtues, gestures, prejudices, and the like (Fesmire, 2003, pp.10). This view of habits is what Dewey termed habits of thought or habits of mind. Dewey suggested that habits not only inform action, but also reflective thought. In a Deweyan sense, habits are both the product of our entwinement with our environments and the tools that we have at our disposal to coordinate with the environment to maintain stability and experience growth (Fritz, 2012). More specifically, Dewey conceived habits of thought as beliefs and predispositions to think and act, such as a sense of purpose in life, coping efficacy, and biases and prejudices etc. (Clark, 2000) and claimed that such tendencies to think in certain ways are in fact also habits because they represent an acquired predisposition to respond to situations in a particular way. The acquisition of habits has been linked to the co-constitutive nature of person and culture. It is believed that the person and culture operate together in a truly interpenetrating manner (Mistry & Wu, 2010). Similarly, it is believed that family level constructs such as family assets, beliefs and values are situated within the community-level constructs representing a mutuality that goes beyond bidirectional influences. In other words, social and cultural influences on belief systems cannot be ignored when considering parental decision-making strategies.

**Life course sociology.** In order to understand the social and cultural existence of families, life course sociology provides an opportunity to study the occupations of parenting in a holistic manner. The life course perspective as a concept describes a sequence of age-graded roles, which are a consequence of opportunities, expectations and limitations. Expectations are typically decided by societal norms and structure the life course. Thus, the life course perspective as a paradigm examines situations holistically, taking into account concepts like social roles, historical contexts, institutions such as education and family, linked lives, timing of events, and human agency, to mention a few (Elder, 1998). For the purpose of this study, two distinct life course concepts were used as guiding points to study the occupations of parenting. First, to illustrate the additive or leveling effects of adverse or favorable situations, *cumulative advantage/disadvantage* is discussed. Next, in order to examine parenting roles in the contexts of other roles, the concept of *pathways* is described.

***Cumulative advantage/disadvantage (CAD).*** Cumulative advantage refers to the idea that early advantage can be leveraged for greater gain in later life, and it has received conceptual development as well as empirical support in research on a variety of topics ranging from school-tracking systems to age heterogeneity (Ferraro, Shippee, & Schafer, 2009). On the flip side, advantage for some means disadvantage for others. Thus, the metaphor associated with cumulative advantage/disadvantage is that there is accumulation of benefits for those already advantaged but accumulation of loss for those who are disadvantaged early (Ferraro et al., 2009). O’Rand (2006) suggested that the sequential process of cumulative advantage and adversity begins in infancy and childhood and accumulates as biographies diverge. Further, cumulative advantage/disadvantage hangs on two linked concepts: life course capital and life course risk. Life course capital is defined as interdependent stocks of resources across life domains that are

accumulated and/or dissipated over the life course in the satisfaction of human needs and wants. On the other hand, life course risks are defined as the differential likelihoods of exposure to adverse conditions (disadvantages) or structural opportunities (advantages) for the accumulation, protection, or depletion of forms of life course capital (O’Rand, 2006).

In the current study, the concept of CAD is best exemplified by the conditions that influence parenting practices. Mothers rely heavily on their past experiences of being parented, as well as the resources available to them, such as previous education, as capital or risk for their current parenting skills. These conditions are described in detail in Chapter 4 and further discussed in Chapter 5.

***Pathways.*** In agreement with the concept of CAD, Rutter (1989) suggested that continuities would occur because children carry with them the results of earlier learning and earlier structural and functional changes. However, Rutter (1989) argued that this does not necessarily mean that a person’s characteristics at one age will predict the degree or type of *change* over a later time period. These changes are more likely detected by focusing on the process of negotiation of life transitions, and not just their occurrence or the behavioral outcome that followed. Life transitions have been defined as life events that index changes in state or role that are more or less abrupt (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). For example, graduating from high school, entering into a marriage, or becoming a mother are life events that trigger a change in the roles to be fulfilled by an individual. Further, these authors defined pathways as interlocked trajectories of social roles including education, work, family, and residence that are followed by individuals and groups through society. This definition of pathways identifies the interconnected and dynamic nature of trajectories (temporal continuity of roles) and transitions (life events that index changes in roles) over time. It further brings to light the transactional nature of family

roles, which structure the life course. In fact, according to MacMillan and Copher (2005), life courses are structured to the extent that they are differentially defined by the order and timing of multiple social roles.

MacMillan and Copher (2005) also described family role schemas and discussed the varying meanings that these schemas provide to different family roles. They illustrated, for example, the different social meaning associated with parenthood (a social role) within or outside marriage. This difference in meaning influences the trajectory of such a social role and thus is important to keep in mind when attempting to research families. In essence, family role schemas are the cultural tools that define what family roles are (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Further, family roles within larger role configurations and pathways involve interdependencies with extra-family roles of school and work. For example, MacMillan and Copher's (2005) example of teen parenting suggests that parenthood may foster transitions out of schooling and undermines educational attainment over the life course. Thus, social roles and the fulfillment of such roles in light of other roles becomes important to study in order to get a holistic picture of family dynamics.

In the current study, multiple social roles fulfilled by mothers, such as student, wife, or daughter, are apparent. However, this research goes beyond the social roles, exploring also the multiple relational roles within motherhood. Some of these include a mother's role as protector, mentor, nurturer, caregiver and learner. The conceptualization of mothering as a relational role is further discussed in Chapter 4.

## **Conclusion**

Parenting children with or without disabilities is a complex process involving conscious and sub-conscious decision making abilities. Parenting cannot be limited to being considered a co-occupation or as taken to only include family routines. Instead, one must consider parenting

as a relational role and recognize the importance of social roles and how they interconnect with one another. The concert of mothering roles that encompasses many habits and occupations provides an opportunity to explore these occupations at multiple levels. The current research conceptualizes mothering as a relational role, outlining the conditions that influence mothering occupations spanning over a temporal context, and finally presents a transactional framework of parental decision-making.

In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature with a particular focus on the study of families, family theories, and existing theories of parenting practices. Chapter 3 will outline the methods used for the study and the rationale for using grounded theory methodology. In Chapter 4, I present the findings from the current study including the Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making. Finally, in Chapter 5, the implications for the findings of this research are discussed and situated within existing parenting research as well as occupational science.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are differing views regarding whether (or how) to conduct a literature review as part of grounded theory studies. Some argue that since grounded theory is an emergent methodology, the literature review process should be delayed as much as possible. Glaser was a strong believer that conducting a literature review early in the process will bias the researcher and the emergence of categories will then be tainted by the knowledge already gained. On the other hand, some scholars believe that all researchers bring a level of prior knowledge to their research (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006) and this must be recognized in order to complete a successful grounded theory study. Charmaz (2014) believes that conducting a literature review is essential, but strongly emphasizes that the existing literature should be used as a source of “sensitizing concepts” which can guide the data collection and analysis process. The purpose of acknowledging sensitizing concepts is to create a reflexive and informed process of data collection and analysis. Thus, following Charmaz’s perspective, the literature presented here is done so to help situate the data collection and analysis that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

This chapter has been organized into four sections. The first section of this review highlights existing family theories and how they guide the study of parenting practices. Although there is much debate about reviewing existing theories before a grounded theory project, Charmaz has emphasized that it is important to know the sort of research that exists about a certain phenomenon in order to avoid wasting time and energy on areas that may already be well theorized. The second section highlights the research within occupational science (OS) to reflect the trajectory of family occupation and related research within the field. The third section

highlights research from outside OS regarding known influences on parenting practices to identify sensitizing concepts for the current research. Finally, existing models of parenting children with behavior problems are discussed, and a rationale for the current study is presented.

### **Family Theories**

Some researchers within the fields of sociology and psychology appear to approach and study the family as a thing-like entity, that is, an object that can be objectively observed and described. Yet, family theories have progressively moved from a child-centered individualistic approach to a family-centered systems approach. The theories discussed below highlight this progression. The current research aims to provide a more holistic approach than existing theories to understand parental decision-making.

One of the most prominent theories within developmental psychology is Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development. He posited that proximal as well as distal forces influenced a child's behavior, and thus focused on the interactions between the microsystem (e.g., family and school), mesosystem (e.g., relationship between home and school), exosystem (e.g., relationship between home and parent's workplace), macrosystem (e.g., society and culture), and chronosystems (changes over the life course) in relation to the developing child. In addition, within sociology, family systems theory began to develop in the 1960's (Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009). This systems approach to families viewed families as open systems and there was considerable interaction among the family subsystems (Cox & Paley, 2003). The systems theory perspective implied that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts, change in one subsystem created changes in other subsystems, and that feedback loops guided behavior (Smith et al., 2009). Although the influence of environmental factors was recognized, the person-environment dichotomy is still evident in much of the systems theory literature.

The evolution of family theories also led scholars to develop and apply a transactional model of child development (Sameroff, 2009; Fiese, 2007). Within this transactional model, the experience of an individual would somehow change, adapt or create something new as a result of the transaction with the environment over time. Although a shift in perspective from systems theory towards a more inclusive view of the person and environment, Sameroff (2009) still believed that there are certain experiences that failed to become transactions (and remained interactions) if there was no change taking place over time. For example, if a routine interaction between two people were somehow disrupted, it would be considered a transaction only if they adapted to the new situation over time. Sameroff's argument was that if a change or adaptation does not take place, then no transaction takes place. However, it can be argued that humans are ever changing social beings and all interactions are in fact transactions; therefore, a false distinction between the two should not exist. This view is more consistent with the occupational science view of the transactional perspective.

Another developmental model that provided an understanding of the complexities of parenting was the developmental niche described by Harkness et al. (2007). These authors posited that the developmental niche included three domains: settings (physical and social, as well as a child's daily routine), customs (customs and habits of care), and caretaker psychology (parental ethnotheories or the values and beliefs that guide parent behavior). Culture was at the heart of this developmental niche because it was presumed to be the guiding principle behind all domains. In other words, a person's cultural embeddedness and history guides their perspectives about parenting strategies, customs of care and values and beliefs.

Finally, Mistry and Wu (2010) further imbued the social and cultural contexts into their work, in which they suggested a relational metatheory position, where person and culture are



mutually constitutive in a truly interpenetrating manner. These researchers, in an attempt to describe the navigation between cultural worlds, recognized that individual, family and community level constructs operate together. Mistry and Wu believe that family-level assets and ethnotheories are situated in community-level constructs representing a mutuality that surpasses simple bidirectional influences. The models of Harkness et al. (2007) and Mistry and Wu (2010) are most consistent with the transactional perspective described within occupational science.

The transactional view on occupation would suggest that the social, cultural and historical influences on parenting practices should guide future research on families within occupational science. The current project acknowledges the shortcomings of existing theories and aims to build upon models that articulate the social, cultural and historical influences on parental decision-making, which are lacking in the existing occupational science literature.

### **Study of Families in Occupational Science**

Segal (1999) recognized that individual occupations are different from family occupations. She urged researchers that to study families, we must move beyond the individual. She described “doing for others”, or a commitment to sacrificing the needs of one for another within a family, and recognized that this could not be studied at an individual level. Following her argument, occupational scientists have attempted to study family occupations through the study of family routines and rituals. Similar to family theories described above, parenting occupations also have been studied primarily as co-occupations with an individualistic focus, and a more recent emphasis on family occupations as being socially co-constructed. Each of these areas of scholarship is described below.

**Family routines and rituals.** The overall rhythms of a household are made up of the coordinated routines of the family members (Fiese, 2007). Families also create a variety of rituals that make them distinct from others. Routines upheld within family life provide the

structure that allow people to develop and maintain healthful lives (Koome, Hocking, & Sutton, 2012). For this reason, family routines and rituals, and disruptions to family routines, have been researched over several decades and in many contexts (Fiese et al., 2002). Routines and rituals have been defined differently by different scholars (Segal, 2004). The most commonly used description is that routines are undertaken for the purpose of accomplishing an instrumental task or goal, whereas rituals are described as acts that carry some symbolic meaning. Some scholars have placed these on a continuum (Evans & Rodger, 2008), while others have described them as hierarchical, nesting within the larger realm of occupations. Regardless of the way these terms have been defined, it has been found that the maintenance of routines and rituals promotes health and well-being (Downs, 2008; Evans & Rodger, 2008; Koome et al., 2012), and helps to create a family identity (Evans & Rodger, 2008; Fiese, 2007; Koome et al., 2012).

Within the literature that has focused on family routines, researchers have attempted to study a variety of contexts. For example, Downs (2008) studied leisure routines of families with children with disabilities and found that these leisure activities led to a sense of normalcy, control and happiness in these families. She also found that maintaining healthy leisure routines resulted in increased levels of self-efficacy for parents. Similarly, Evans and Rodger (2008) while studying mealtime and bedtime routines of typically developing children, found that routines gave them a sense of belonging and social support while at the same time helping develop a sense of family identity. Researchers have thus used family routines as a means to better understand family practices, and in turn, to better describe family occupations.

**Parenting occupations.** In the family focused literature within OS, parenting has often been considered a co-occupation (Orban, Ellegard, & Thorngren-Jerneck, 2012; Pierce, 2009). Co-occupations have been described as highly interactive types of occupations in which the

actions of one influence and shape the actions of another (Pierce, 2009). Although not restricted to the parent-child dyad, co-occupations are typically described as the back and forth interactions that occur between a mother and a child. Further, co-occupations have been described as highly interactive; however, Pierce (2009) has argued that this interaction need not be face to face. For example, if a child spreads out his/her toys in the morning and the mother picks them up and puts them away in the evening, this qualifies as a co-occupation. However, the person-centered approach of co-occupations is not fully able to capture the complexities that are associated with family beliefs and values, or the influence of other family members on parenting occupations.

In a similar attempt, Larson (2000) used “orchestration” as a metaphor for occupations and applied this to mothering occupations. She recognized the importance of decision-making and thought processes that are involved in occupations associated with mothering. For example, she included the constructs of planning, organizing and forecasting within what she called, “the dance that mothers do”. Larson also recognized the influence of the temporal context with respect to mothering, as she explored mothers’ use of planning for the immediate future as well as forecasting their child’s long term future.

In a slightly different conceptualization of parenting occupations, Lawlor (2003) has argued that in order to study families effectively the unit of analysis needs to move from observable behavior to the situation of the family as a whole. She believes that children co-construct their worlds socially and culturally. Similarly, childhood experiences are co-created through social occupations. Lawlor (2003) believes that actors are transactional and the actions of one shape and influence the actions of another in a way that enhances the child’s experiences. In an idea most in line with the transactional perspective (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006), Lawlor describes occupations as “socially constructed actions.” More recently, Bonsall (2014)

has utilized this concept as well as recognized the importance of social and historical influences on fathering occupations. He further articulated that past events and future goals influence present actions. This life course perspective is also in line with the transactional view on occupation of diminishing the boundaries between past, present and future (Cutchin & Dickie, 2013), and shifting the focus away from an individualistic approach.

**Gaps in the occupational science literature.** Although an excellent way to describe family occupations, the routines literature has almost exclusively focused on families of children with disabilities with very few exceptions (c.f.e. Evans & Rodger, 2012). Furthermore, the research that has focused on family routines and rituals has utilized parent interviews with few observations of the family “doing” or “being.” This research has had an individualistic, descriptive perspective and not one that focuses on process. As such, many of these studies have described the “who” and the “what” of family occupations, but have paid much less attention to the “how” and the “why”.

Similarly, the research associated with parenting as a co-occupation has generated descriptive knowledge with little attention to understanding parenting practices as being socially and culturally informed. Lawlor’s (2003; 2012) descriptions of childhood occupations and engagement in occupations in terms of intersubjectivity has provided an opportunity to overcome some of what is lacking in other parenting literature within occupational science. However, there is much more work to be done in order to understand the “social connectedness” of childhood engagement as well as the historical, social and cultural influences on parenting practices. For example, a mother’s response to her child’s behavior is influenced by her cultural understanding of what parenting *should* look like, and also, her memories of being parented. In addition, the social structure and support the mother has for parenting are likely to inform parental decision-

making, from nurturing family members acting as a positive influence to an unsafe neighborhood perhaps negatively influencing parenting decisions. The existing research that has focused primarily on description has ignored the process and decision-making behind parenting practices. Primeau's (2000) work illustrates this issue. She explored the "traditional" and "non-traditional" gender identities of parents with respect to household and child care tasks, and while an excellent description of mothers' and fathers' role identities, the study did not delve into the reasons for such ideologies and the cultural and social embeddedness of these role identities. The current research is process-oriented in that it has a focus on "how" and "why" social, cultural and temporal contexts inform parents' decisions about everyday parenting occupations.

Moreover, the understanding of parenting within occupational science has conceptualized mothering (or parenting) as an occupation, or rather, co-occupation. The current research strives to apply a life course perspective and transactional perspective, to consider parenting as a relational role encompassing many occupations influenced by social, cultural, physical, spatial and temporal contexts. As with most definitions of occupation, the description of parenting practices in occupational science also has adhered to the false separation between individual and environment; person and culture; and past, present and future experiences. This project aims to eliminate such false separations and understand the parental decision-making situation as a whole.

### **Study of Parenting Outside of Occupational Science**

Early parenting quality has been related to a host of child outcomes such as behavior problems, school outcomes, social emotional competence, and cognitive development. A reciprocal relationship has been identified between child behaviors and parenting practices (Harvey & Metcalfe, 2012; Patterson, 1992). For this reason, many scholars have conceded that parenting matters (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005), and have recognized the vast number of

factors that influence parenting. Before interviewing the mothers for the current research, the known factors that could influence parental decision-making were identified. The purpose of this section is to briefly describe some of the prominent literature about the known factors that influence parenting practices. These factors were used as what Charmaz has described as “sensitizing concepts” to guide the data collection and analysis process. These sensitizing concepts are: parents’ perceptions about child behavior; parents’ communication style; parenting style; intergenerational transmission; family situation; and socio-demographic factors.

**Perceptions about child behavior.** One of the factors that influences parental practices is how parents perceive their child’s behavior (Benzies, Harrison, & Magill-Evans, 2004). For example, when a child throws a tantrum, the parent must actively consider how to respond. This decision-making can be based on what the parent believes the child’s intentions are. Parents may indulge in harsh parenting when the child is as young as 2 to 18 months of age, if they believe their child understands that their actions are wrong (Burchinal, Skinner, & Reznick, 2010). Burchinal et al. (2010) found that mothers who believed that their child was “pushing my buttons” or “testing me” used this intentionality as a justification for harsher parenting strategies (e.g., giving a slap on the child’s hand, threatening to spank with a switch or belt).

By interviewing mothers about their child’s behavior and their response to it, the current research aims to gain a better understanding of the subjective perspectives about how mothers make decisions everyday.

**Communication style.** There is a growing belief that healthy conflict in any parent-child relationship can be developmentally enhancing (Laible & Thompson, 2002). Within families, conflict related to the child’s development is usually present at two crucial time points. First, when the child begins to develop a sense of autonomy during toddlerhood or early childhood,

and second, during adolescence when the child begins to physically and psychologically distance himself/herself from the parents (Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). Positive communication, or a healthy manner of conflict resolution, involves the parents' use of justification rather than forced compliance (e.g., a parent says to a child, "you are not allowed to play on the street" versus "you are not allowed to play on the street *because* there is a lot of traffic at this time"). Further, parents' recognition of, and sensitivity towards, their child's emotions during communication exchanges with their child leads to better conflict management (Laible & Thompson, 2002). In fact, parents' use of positive conflict resolution strategies leads to children's increased social competence, as children learn to apply these strategies during interactions with their peers or siblings.

The current research explores how mothers communicate with their children when behavioral challenges arise, keeping in mind that communications styles of the parent and child can influence parental responses.

**Parenting style.** Parenting styles have been extensively studied, and scholars have tried to categorize them, as well as identified the positive and negative child outcomes related to various parenting styles. However, many individual differences exist in parenting behaviors and concrete categories may not always work. Nonetheless, many scholars have identified categories such as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, and more recently the focus has been on parental supportiveness (Fulgini et al., 2013).

Similarly, Kawabata, Alink, Tseng, van Ijzendoorn, and Crick (2011) identified four groups of parenting styles. These authors developed the following categories: positive parenting, negative or harsh parenting, uninvolved parenting, and psychologically controlling parenting. They found that parents with a negative or uninvolved parenting style were more likely to have

children that engaged in relational aggression, whereas positive parenting was associated with less relational aggression. Other scholars also have emphasized the relationship between harsh parenting and increased child behavioral problems (c.f.e. Patterson, 1992), and contrasted this with the relationships found between positive child outcomes and parental warmth and nurturing (Benzies et al., 2004; Harvey & Metcalfe, 2012).

In general, parenting styles are labels that can be influenced by other parenting practices. More specifically, a parent's attitude towards their child, their personal communication style, and their supportiveness towards their child must all be considered in tandem when identifying a person's parenting style.

**Intergenerational transmission.** Scientists and non-scientists alike agree that parenting practices are transmitted from one generation to the next (Belsky, Jaffee, Sligo, Woodward, & Silva, 2005; Caspi & Elder, 1988; Conger, Schofield, & Neppl, 2012). Most of this literature has focused on the intergenerational transmission of the specific parenting practices of spanking or corporal punishment and attitudes towards the same (Bower-Russa, 2005; Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003). These studies typically explore child maltreatment, previous abuse and/or sexual abuse (Conger, Schofield, Neppl, & Merrick, 2013; Dixon, Browne, & Hamilton-Giachrists et al., 2009), breaking the cycle of violence (Dixon et al., 2009), and preventing violence or abuse.

We know that parents who have experienced abuse or neglect in their family of origin are more likely to exhibit negative or at-risk parenting behaviors towards their own children. Yet, intergenerational transmission is not entirely deterministic (Kim, 2012); while it is true that emotionally abused or neglected individuals often carry that abuse into adulthood, certainly not all of these parents engage in negative or at-risk parenting (McCullough, Harding, Shaffer, Han,



& Bright, 2014). One of the reasons this occurs is because there are influences on parenting besides one's family of origin (Capaldi, Pears, Kerr, & Owen, 2008) that can break the cycle of abuse (Dixon et al., 2009). Some of these include the attitudes towards physical punishment (Deater-Deckard et al., 2003); gender of the parent (Lunkenheimer, Kittler, Olsen, & Kleinberg, 2006); and the presence of a safe, nurturing partner (Jaffee et al., 2013). For example, Deater-Deckard and colleagues found that adolescents who had been spanked by their own mothers were more approving of this discipline method, regardless of the overall frequency, timing, or chronicity of physical discipline they had received. Additionally, Lunkenheimer and colleagues found that for mothers, their own mother's use of physical punishment significantly predicted their current endorsement of physical punishment; however, for fathers, perceived harshness of childhood discipline predicted current endorsement of physical punishment. Finally, repetition of harsh parenting across generations is less likely to occur if adults have "worked through" their negative childhood experiences, or if they have had corrective experiences in close, supportive relationships such as the marital relationship (Lunkenheimer et al., 2006).

Similarly, protective factors such as financial solvency and social support distinguished the people who successfully broke the cycle of abuse from those that maintained or initiated it (Dixon et al., 2009), and marital satisfaction moderated the intergenerational transmission of physical punishment for fathers, but not mothers (Lunkenheimer et al., 2006). In other words, marital conflict has been shown to be more predictive of fathers' use of physical punishment than that of mothers.

It is reasonable to assume that a mother's family of origin will influence everyday parenting strategies. The current research recognizes, however that other situational factors can influence the degree to which intergenerational transmission plays a part in parental decision-

making.

**Family situation.** Many parents have identified that their situation as a whole impacts their decisions regarding parenting. Some of these situational factors include marital conflict, family stress, socio-economic status, and chronic illness (Benzies et al., 2004). In addition, family restructuring or transitions play a role in parenting strategies as well as influence child outcomes (Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998). The overall functioning of a family, in particular as related to lower parent education, poorer socio-economic status, and disrupted family routines has been associated with family chaos. Apart from disrupted family routines, chaos is characterized by noise and over-crowding of the home. Chaos within the home has been related to poor language and cognitive outcomes for children (Vernon-Feagons et al., 2012) as well as associated with more behavior problems (Deater-Deckard et al., 2009).

In addition, inconsistent discipline and disrupted family practices can lead to poor effortful control in children, which is associated with higher levels of behavior problems. Further, effortful control is associated with the development of morality, conscience, fewer behavioral challenges and improved social competence in children (Poehlmann, Burson, & Weymouth, 2014). As such, the emergence of effortful control in children has thus been regarded as a protective factor for children experiencing difficult family situations. Therefore, it is important to recognize parent-identified situational factors that can act as risk or protective factors during disruptive family situations.

**Socio-demographic factors.** Many scholars have identified differences in parenting practices based on the gender of the parent as well as the child. It has been found that girls consistently exhibit higher levels of effortful control than boys (Poehlmann et al., 2014); thus, boys are more often found to display externalizing behavior problems. Further, when boys

exhibit externalizing behavior problems, they are associated with harsher responses from parents across ethnic groups (Polaha, Larzelere, Shapiro, & Pettit, 2004). In regards to parent gender, maternal uninvolved is associated with increased relational aggression in children, but not paternal (Kawabata et al., 2011). Yet, the same authors found that paternal psychological control was associated with higher levels of relational aggression, especially in girls. Based on parents' perceptions of traditional gender norms, subtle differences also may exist in parental responses towards child behavior.

It also has been well documented that ethnic differences exist in parenting practices. Researchers have found, for example, that African-American and Hispanic mothers are less likely to read to their children than European-American mothers in the general population as well as in low-income samples (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005), and that European-American mothers are more likely to use child intentionality as an excuse for harsher parenting than African-American or Latino-American mothers (Burchinal et al., 2010). Other examples of ethnic differences also exist in overall parental supportiveness and respect for parental authority. Fulgini et al. (2013) reported that Latino-American and African-American mothers showed decreasing parent supportiveness towards their children over time. In a different study, African-American and Latino-American girls showed more respect for authority towards their parents than did European-American girls (Dixon et al., 2008). More respect for parental authority was in turn associated with fewer conflict situations between parents and children.

African-American parenting styles have traditionally been considered harsher and less sensitive than European-American parenting styles (Iruka, 2009; Lansford et al., 2012; Polaha et al., 2004); however, this difference has not always been linked to child outcomes. Polaha et al. (2004) found that teacher-rated externalizing behavior problems were higher for European-

American boys in contrast to African-American boys even if both groups were harshly parented. This indicates that harsh parenting could be more detrimental to European-American children than to African-American children (Iruka, 2009). One of the reasons for this difference has been hypothesized as the normativeness of parenting practices as being different for different ethnicities (Lansford et al., 2012). In other words, what is considered the norm for African-American mothers is different from the norm for European-American or Hispanic mothers. This differential scale of what is considered effective parenting in different ethnicities appears to translate into child outcomes. Parents rely on cultural influences to develop their parenting theory (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994); thus, it is important to recognize that parenting theory or how one parents their children can be different based on culture and ethnicity.

**Gaps in the literature.** Most of the literature related to factors that influence parenting practices has considered parent-child relationships as bidirectional interactions. As such, the exploration of the social and cultural context in which the family operates, or the family situation as a whole has not always been considered. In many studies, ethnicity, demographics, or socio-economic status have been identified as “control variables”, or variables that may mediate or moderate the relationship between parenting practices and child outcomes. These correlational studies have enhanced knowledge about parenting practices, and have acknowledged the social and cultural context but have failed to understand the family situation as a whole. Spicer (2010) has argued that culture drives the hopes and dreams that parents have for their children and that culture influences the way parents perceive parenting advice. That said, in too many of our studies of parenting, ethnicity is used as a proxy for culture which creates inaccurate representations of child outcomes. Different parenting theories driven by cultural differences lead to different parenting styles (Julian et al., 1994), but may not always lead to different child

outcomes. Many of the parenting differences highlighted in the literature could be generalized across ethnicities (Iruka, 2009), but not across cultures. For this reason, although it is beneficial to understand how ethnic differences mediate parenting practices, it may be more beneficial to understand how cultural processes shape parental decision-making practices as they relate to child outcomes.

In addition, most of these studies have used quantitative modes of inquiry, and thus have operationalized and quantified some subjective factors such as maternal warmth and supportiveness. Although valid and reliable scales have been used to measure such factors and the studies themselves are quite rigorous, qualitative study of these constructs will further existing knowledge through a more in-depth and rich exploration of social and cultural situatedness of family practices. Process-oriented qualitative research such as the current grounded theory inquiry is thus well suited to fill the gaps in existing literature.

### **Models of Parenting Children with Behavioral Challenges**

Some of the ideas that have influenced theory development regarding parenting practices have originated through the extensive study of anti-social (Patterson, 1992) and aggressive behaviors in children (Dodge & Crick, 1990), as well as the intergenerational transmission of violence (Dodge & Crick, 1990; Kim, 2012) in families. Many of these theories have emphasized the importance of social and/or cultural contexts; however, they often still view the parent-child interaction as a bidirectional process. Patterson (1992) described the coercive model of anti-social behavior and highlighted that the level of intensity of deviant behavior in children usually predicts their progression to the next stage of deviancy. This model pertains specifically to deviant behaviors in anti-social children and not necessarily typically developing children with behavior problems, however, Patterson (1992) also described coercive parenting practices which have some relevance to the current study. He believed that there was a bidirectional, reciprocal

relationship that existed between child behavior and parenting practices. In fact, he argued that through inconsistent positive or negative reinforcement for deviant or pro-social acts, respectively, parents “directly train” their children to engage in deviant behavior. According to the model of coercive parenting, disruptive parenting practices acted as a proximal mechanism for children to exhibit behavior problems (Patterson et al., 1998). Coercive parenting and poor parental monitoring have been empirically associated with higher levels of child problem behaviors. Patterson et al. (1998) did include contextual factors, such as socio-economic status, family restructuring or transitions as influencing this process, however the coercive model primarily focuses on the bidirectional influences between parent discipline and child behavior.

**Social information processing.** In an attempt to study aggressive behavior in children, Dodge and Crick (1990) outlined the social information processing model. They believed that individuals interpret social cues, make decisions about how to respond to those cues, and then act accordingly. For aggressive children, they concluded that more often than not, a violent response was enacted due to the inaccurate interpretation of a social stimulus from another person.

The main components of the social information processing theory include representativeness (appropriate categorization of the stimulus), availability (cognitive processing of available responses from memory), and accessibility (responses from recent events that are in the short-term memory). For example, if a child is pushed in the lunch line, his response would depend on his perception of the pusher’s intentions, the frequency of the pusher’s previous “attacks”, and the different ways to respond from the child’s memory. In other words, the proximal mechanism for a response is the active cognitive process of decision-making about how to respond. The distal mechanism is the availability of response choices from latent memory.

Although used to study child aggressive behavior, the social information processing

model has been applied to parenting as well. For example, Azar, Reitz, and Goslin (2008) believed that parents employ the social information processing model to make active decisions about how to respond to a child's behavior. These authors believe that cognitive flexibility, planning and thinking are important aspects of the parenting process. They argue that had parenting been simply instinctual or a conditioned response to routines, then parent training and education would not work. We do know that parent education has been successful in the short-term decrease of behavior problems in children (Patterson et al., 1992), and Azar and her colleagues suggest this is due to the active thinking and decision-making involved in the parenting process. It is also noteworthy that stress (or cognitive demands) and life factors associated with stress, such as living in poverty, can affect parents' ability to make sound judgments in the moment. Azar's assertion provides a rationale for studying parental decision-making processes, and the goals of the current research are in line with this form of inquiry.

### **Addressing Gaps in the Literature: The Transactional Perspective**

Daly (2003) has argued that existing theories about family functioning are very different from the theories that families live by everyday. The disjointed nature of the theories that exist about family and the theories that families actually live by behooves us to explore what Daly (2003) has described as negative spaces. Using an art metaphor, Daly (2003) argued that negative spaces are just as important as positive forms, and he studied the negative spaces of family beliefs and values, material consumption of families, and the coordinates of space and time.

In my opinion, within occupational science, the process of parenting has been a negative space for a long time. Although many descriptive studies exist about the occupations that families engage in, the social and cultural influences on engagement in these occupations has not been fully explored. One of the reasons for this may be the focus on individualism that continues

to exist within occupational science research. Parenting has been considered as a co-occupation in most studies, ignoring the family situation as a whole. This missing piece in the occupational science parenting literature is similar to what has been observed in other disciplines.

Inspired by symbolic interactionism and the pragmatist traditions of John Dewey, some occupational scientists have critiqued the emphasis on individualism (Dickie et al., 2006) and have proposed a transactional perspective. As a sociological perspective, symbolic interactionism considers individuals to be co-constructors within society. That is, people interpret their world from others' responses to their actions and based on those interpretations, they act again (Nayar, 2012). Similarly, the transactional perspective overcomes the boundaries between person and environment, and between past, present, and future (Cutchin & Dickie, 2013). The emphasis is on going beyond the individual to encompass social, cultural, physical, spatial and temporal environments.

In addition, habits, the building blocks of occupations, are considered as the acquired predispositions or ways to respond to situations (Cutchin & Dickie, 2012). Through the use of habits and habit repertoires which have been acquired through our oneness with culture, it is believed that we “functionally coordinate” with our environments when “problematic situations arise”. This can be true of parental decision-making as well, especially when the transactional perspective is applied to Dodge and Crick's social information processing model. For example, a parent that is interpreting the child's behavior and figuring out how to respond is likely using habit repertoires for response enactment. The acquisition of habits has been linked to the co-constitutive nature of person and culture. It is believed that the person and culture operate together in a truly interpenetrating manner (Mistry & Wu, 2010). Similarly, it is believed that family level constructs such as family assets, beliefs and values are situated within the



community-level constructs representing a mutuality that goes beyond bidirectional influences. In other words, social and cultural influences cannot be ignored when considering parental decision-making strategies. Chapter 5 explores this transactional decision-making in detail, in light of the findings from the current research.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to describe the current research related to parenting in occupational science as well as in other disciplines. The existing family theories have included child-oriented explanations of parent behavior; bidirectional, reciprocal parent-child interactions; and the cultural influences on parenting through the developmental niche. Additionally, I identified the descriptive nature of parenting occupations through family routines and rituals, as well as the existing view of parenting as a co-occupation. The known factors that influence parenting such as socio-demographic traits, parents' communication styles, and intergenerational transmission are important sensitizing concepts, which guided the data collection, and analysis for the current research as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. Finally, established models of parenting were discussed, highlighting the possible enhancement of such models using the transactional view on occupations.

In light of this literature review, the current research is significant for multiple reasons. First, the findings presented in the subsequent chapters express parenting in a holistic manner. The findings do not focus on individualism but rather on the transaction among parent, child, and family situation, with an emphasis on social, cultural, spatial, and historical contexts. Next, the process-oriented approach of grounded theory methodology explores the “why” and “how” of parental decision-making instead of simply describing the “what” and “who” of parenting occupations. Finally, the Transactional Model of Parental Decision-Making presented in Chapter 5 builds upon current models of parenting, and moves occupational science research towards

theory development (see Figure 4.2). The model presented can be applied to multiple contexts and populations in future research to inform early intervention practice as well as prevention of maladaptive parenting strategies.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used for the current research is grounded theory. This chapter provides a history and description of the different schools of grounded theory. Next, the rationale for using constructivist grounded theory methodology as the chosen mode of inquiry for this research study is presented. The manner in which the research was carried out is also highlighted, including methods of data collection, data management strategies, and data analysis techniques. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed with an emphasis on how rigor was maintained in the research process.

#### **Emergence of Grounded Theory**

Two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, developed grounded theory in the 1960's. At that time, within the field of sociology, there was much tension between qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Charmaz, 2014). The methodology Glaser and Strauss proposed, was considered a radical move because it refocused qualitative inquiry on the methods of analyses.

Glaser, who was trained at Columbia University, was steeped in the quantitative tradition and positivism during his time there; in contrast, Strauss trained under the pragmatist traditions of Dewey and Mead at the University of Chicago. When they jointly developed this methodology, their aim was to develop a rigorous qualitative mode of inquiry for their studies of death and dying. Many of the original tenets of grounded theory came from Glaser; thus, grounded theory was focused on empiricism, emergence, and specialized language that echoed quantitative methodologies (Charmaz, 2014). This was not surprising, considering that Glaser

and Strauss were trying to establish a purely qualitative methodology in a climate where quantitative methodologies were dominant.

At its core, the procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of the social phenomena under study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). To that end, Glaser, in his original statement, emphasized the development of “middle range” theories (Charmaz, 2014) as opposed to “grand” theorizing, which would emerge from the analysis of qualitative data in an iterative process. He believed that theory would be *discovered* by analyzing the data inductively.

### **Schools of Grounded Theory**

As mentioned before, the philosophical orientations of Glaser and Strauss were rather different. Likely for this reason, Strauss and Glaser have taken the development of grounded theory methodologies in divergent directions. Whereas Glaser continues to stand by his original perspective about discovery of theory from data (Heath & Cowley, 2003), Strauss’ focus has been on process, rather than structure (Charmaz, 2014), or action rather than things, and subjectivity, rather than objectivity. Due to his close ties with pragmatism and symbolic interactionism at the University of Chicago, Strauss truly believes in social situations being understood through symbols and meanings and represented through action.

Although the ontological assumptions of Glaser and Strauss are different, the practical differences between Strauss’ and Glaser’s methodologies appear to be limited to subtle differences in analytical strategies (Heath & Cowley, 2003). For instance, Glaser emphasized inductive analysis of the data; yet, Strauss favored a combination of inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and constant comparison (a form of data verification for analytical purposes) (Charmaz, 2014; Heath & Cowley, 2003). More specifically, Strauss, along with colleague Juliet Corbin, developed a “coding paradigm” called axial coding which laid out

somewhat rigid criteria for coding data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Glaser's original emphasis on grounded theory being an emergent design led him to criticize the use of such a paradigm, remarking that this would lead to forcing the data into pre-conceived categories, ignore emergence, and result in "full conceptual description" rather than in grounded theorizing. In fact, it also has been proposed that Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory does not prioritize theory development as a goal (Cooney, 2010). Corbin and Strauss have since evolved in their thinking and proposed that their axial coding paradigm is simply a guide and not a rigid set of steps that must be followed. In fact, some have also argued that the evolution of Corbin and Strauss' perspective was motivated by a constructivist intent (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

The constructivist tradition of grounded theory, first proposed by Kathy Charmaz, is another school of grounded theory methodology. Although launching from Glaser's original statement of grounded theory as an iterative, comparative, emergent, and open-ended methodology, constructivist grounded theorists believe that research is a socially constructed process. They conceptualize data as constructed, rather than collected or generated and thus a theory using such data is also constructed by the researcher and participant(s) in collaboration. Within this tradition, importance is placed on social and cultural constructions of human action and thus this school of grounded theory favors relativist ontology. In other words, constructivists believe that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute. For example, Clarke (2003), working from a constructivist perspective, proposed that research must move beyond the focus on the individual towards the social situation as a whole.

Overall, the different schools of grounded theory present only subtle differences in technique. However, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of each are quite different. Charmaz (2014) has argued that grounded theory techniques are rather universal in that they can be applied to many research scenarios. What makes grounded theory different in each of these scenarios is the representation of the findings based on different ontological assumptions. Although Glaser and Strauss' original statement of grounded theory implied a post-positivist tradition, some have argued that Glaser's orientation was highly positivist (Cooney, 2010), and that he believed in an objective reality that could be discovered by a neutral observer. In contrast, Corbin and Strauss' post-positivist approach used a rigid coding system that some argue ignores the emergence of theory and forces data into preconceived categories. The focus for Corbin and Strauss, then, has been on conceptual description, and theory development may not be the ultimate goal. The constructivist school of grounded theory represents a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. The coding procedures are more flexible within this school and the focus is on theory construction.

### **Rationale for Employing Constructivist Grounded Theory**

As outlined in Chapter 2, parenting research within occupational science (OS) is highly descriptive in nature with an emphasis on family routines and rituals, and the descriptions of mothering as a co-occupation. The study of parental beliefs and values, cultural and historical influences, as well as the everyday decision-making processes that influence parenting practices is missing from the literature. One of the preferred methodologies for pursuing such process-oriented research is grounded theory. Within OS, it has been proposed that social processes unfold over time as a result of engagement in occupations (Nayar, 2012). Grounded theory research is very well suited to study such social phenomena as parenting, especially due to its close ties with symbolic interactionism. In addition, the social and cultural situatedness of

families (Mistry & Wu, 2010) provides the basis for a constructivist inquiry into parenting practices.

As a novice researcher and doctoral student, my research is dependent on my ontological and epistemological assumptions. Like Charmaz's (2014) view on social phenomena, I believe that experiences are socially constructed, and social realities are multiple and processual. Additionally, using the life course perspective, and viewing mothering as a relational role in a historical and socio-cultural context, is in line with Charmaz's representation of a constructivist perspective. For this reason, I employ Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory methodology in this research project. Using that as a starting point, the following sections highlight the manner in which this study was conducted.

### **Role of the Literature Review in Grounded Theory**

There are differing views regarding conducting a literature review in grounded theory studies. Some argue that since grounded theory is an emergent methodology, the literature review process should be delayed until after data analysis is complete (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser was a strong believer that conducting a literature review early in the process would bias the researcher and the emergence of categories would then be tainted by the knowledge already gained. Alternatively, some scholars believe that all researchers bring a level of prior knowledge to their research (Mills et al., 2006), and that this must be recognized in order to complete a successful grounded theory study. In addition, it is important to know the sort of research that exists about a certain phenomenon in order to avoid wasting time and energy on areas that might already be well theorized. Charmaz (2014) believes that conducting a literature review is essential but strongly emphasizes that the existing literature should be used as a source of "sensitizing concepts" which can guide the data collection and analysis process. The purpose of acknowledging sensitizing concepts is to create a reflexive and informed process of data

collection and analysis. Thus, the literature presented in the previous chapter has been used as such. Based on the research discussed in the literature review, the sensitizing concepts for this study include socio-demographic factors such as gender and ethnicity; as well as known influences on parenting such as communication styles, perceptions of child behavior, intergenerational transmission, and the family situation as a whole.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The primary inclusion criterion for this study was mothers who were primary caregivers of children between the ages of 2 and 6 years old. Charmaz (2014) has advised that researchers should first gather information from sources that have a possibility of providing the richest data. Mothers of children aged 2 to 6 should yield ample information regarding situations in which conflict management or negotiation between parent and child occurred.

Based on previous research that has involved primary caregivers (Brehaut et al., 2003; Ones, Yilmaz, Cetinkaya, & Calgar, 2005), it was noted that the majority of participants (>95%) in studies of primary caregivers, were mothers. Further, Lunkenheimer and colleagues (2006) found that the mechanisms for the endorsement of physical punishment are different for mothers and fathers. Although an in-depth analysis of this distinction would be worthy of study in the future, in order to create a substantive theory truly grounded in the data, I decided to target one group at a time. For these reasons, only mothers were included in this study.

Further, in a national survey of early childhood health and parental discipline, most parents reported using both aversive and non-aversive discipline practices on a regular basis by the child's third year (Regalado, Sareen, Inkelas, Wissow, & Halfon, 2004). According to the Canadian Pediatric Society (2004), late toddlers (2-3 years) struggle for mastery, independence and self-assertion, and the child's frustration at realizing limitations in such struggles leads to temper outbursts. Similarly, pre-school children (3-5 years) have not internalized many rules, are



impressionable, and their judgment is not always sound. They also require good behavioral models after which to pattern their own behavior (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2004). For these reasons, mothers of children between the ages of 2 and 6 were interviewed for this study as their children are most likely to show behavioral challenges, which in turn lead parents to enact disciplinary responses.

Previous studies have substantiated that parenting priorities and family routines are different for families of children with disabilities versus typically developing children (Downs, 2008; Koome, Hocking, & Sutton, 2012). For this reason, participants were excluded from the study if there was any known physical or intellectual disability present in the immediate family, including the child. Further, teen mothers were also excluded from the sample, as they may not have been the primary caregivers of their children.

**Recruitment.** Mothers were initially recruited through convenience sampling, primarily through an existing study being conducted at Virginia Commonwealth University. Teachers in this study are participating in a classroom-based intervention for children at-risk for developing behavioral challenges; thus, research staff affiliated with this project identified mothers they believed would participate and shared study information with classroom teachers. Teachers were provided with an IRB approved flier (see Appendix C) to distribute to parents that contained my contact information. Unfortunately, only one mother was recruited through this project. The study flier was then distributed to local child-care centers, pre-schools, doctors' offices, and Jefferson Area CHIP (Children's Health Improvement Program) offices in the Charlottesville and Fredericksburg, Virginia area. Thirteen additional mothers contacted me to express their interest in the study. After initial contact was made with potential participants, two screening questions were asked: (1) Do you have a child between the ages of 2 and 6, and (2) Does your

child have any known/diagnosed conditions? There were no exclusion criteria based on parent race/ethnicity; however, for the convenience of data collection and analysis, only English-speaking participants were included (as my primary spoken language is English).

Two participants were excluded from the study based on exclusion criteria. One mother was excluded because her child had cerebral palsy, and another did not seem proficient enough in English over the phone in order to answer interview questions. Thus, a total of 12 mothers were recruited for the study and each had at least 1 child between the ages of 2 and 6, with 5 mothers who had 2 children in that age range. These mothers were asked to share information regarding either or both of their children as appropriate. Four of the mothers had 1 other child between the ages of 7 and 18 living in the household; 3 mothers had 2 other children in that age range; and 1 mother had 3 other children. Four mothers lived alone with their children; 5 mothers lived with 1 other adult (partner or spouse); and 3 mothers lived with 2 other adults (including sister, sister-in-law, and adult child). All mothers were between the ages of 26 and 45 years old. The sample was varied in terms of socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Two mothers identified themselves as African-American/Black, 6 as White, non-Hispanic, 1 as Hispanic/Latina, 1 as Asian, and 2 were mixed race. The mothers also had varying levels of education and household incomes. Table 3.1 presents the descriptive statistics of the mothers included in this study.

**Table 3.1: Caregiver demographics**

<b>Mothers</b>		
Age Range	26 – 35	5
	36 – 45	7
Race/Ethnicity	African-American/Black	2
	Caucasian/White	6
	Asian/Pacific Islander	1
	Hispanic/Latino	1
	Other/Mixed	2
Education	Less than high school	1
	GED	0
	High school diploma	4
	Associate's degree	2
	Bachelor's degree	1
	Master's degree	2
	Doctoral degree	0
	Other	2 (Career school; Personal Care Assistant (PCA) and accounting certification)
Annual Household Income	Less than \$15,000	3
	\$15,000 - \$24,999	0
	\$25,000 - \$49,999	4
	\$50,000 - \$99,999	1
	More than \$100,000	2
	Prefer not to answer	2

**Data Collection**

Grounded theory studies primarily make use of qualitative modes of data collection. The most common of these are semi-structured interviews, although observations and the use of documents are not uncommon. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with participants, as the study was focused on mothers' decision-making processes. Most of the interviews were carried out in the mothers' homes, with a few conducted at the local library, and one at a coffee shop. It has been argued that even under relatively natural conditions in the home, interactions between parent and child may be affected by the presence of the observer and recording equipment

(Gardner, 2000). Thus, observations of mother child interactions were not utilized since the study was related to the somewhat sensitive topic of parenting practices.

The initial in-depth interview lasted approximately 50-75 minutes. The second interview was conducted approximately 2-4 weeks after the first and lasted anywhere between 35-50 minutes. Since the interview questions encouraged mothers to introspect on their decision-making, the mothers were given some time to reflect on the questions and their responses before the second interview was conducted. The primary purpose for conducting two interviews was related to the extensive amount of information that needed to be gathered to address the research questions. Another purpose for the second interview was for clarification of data as well as member checking to optimize validity. During the first interview, mothers were asked to describe scenarios from recent experiences with their children that led to a disciplining response from the mother, and appropriate probes were used to get rich and in-depth interview responses regarding decision-making. In the second interview, the mothers were provided with an opportunity to reflect on the previous interview, describe other scenarios with their children, or other factors that influenced their decisions about responding to their child's behavior. Mothers were compensated with a \$25 visa gift card after the completion of each interview. Two mothers were unavailable for the second interview, and thus a total of 22 interviews were conducted.

At the beginning of the first in-person interview, consent was obtained from all recruited participants (see Appendix A). A full explanation of the voluntary nature of participation, study activities, and procedures was clearly presented to each participant. I attempted to answer to the best of my ability all of the participants' questions and two copies of the informed consent documents were provided. The participant was informed that she could elect to skip any portion of the interview or curtail participation at any time. The participant signed both consent

documents, retained one, and returned the other to me. The participant was also asked to complete a demographic information form (see Appendix D). Then, the digital audio recorder (iPhone) was turned on and the interview began.

**Data management.** All consent forms and demographic forms were kept separate from each other in lock boxes. Additionally, participant contact information was stored as a password protected file on a password protected personal laptop. The audio recordings of all interviews were kept on a password and fingerprint protected iPhone until they could be transferred to a password protected laptop. After that, the audio files were deleted from the recording device. The audio files were transcribed verbatim before data analysis began.

**Development of interview guide.** Charmaz (2014) emphasizes the importance of well-conducted interviews that are open-ended and allow the participant to detail their perspective. As a skilled interviewer, it is of utmost importance that one does not ask leading questions. Further, in the constructivist tradition, where it is believed that data is being constructed by researcher and participant, it becomes important to recognize that non-verbal communication, responses to participants' stories and follow-up questions can lead to different types of data. For this reason, I tried to conduct each interview with as much reflexivity as possible, attending to the context of knowledge construction, especially my effect as the researcher, during the interview process. Additionally, the interview guide was developed using as many open-ended questions as possible (see Appendix B). One pilot interview also was conducted to test the wording of questions as well as the kinds of responses being obtained from the questions. In addition, Table 3.2 outlines examples of how sensitizing concepts were used to develop some of the interview questions.

**Table 3.2: Application of sensitizing concepts for data collection**

<b>Example of sensitizing concept</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
Perception of child behavior	What do you think contributed to your child's behavior? What was going on in your mind then? How would you describe how you viewed your child?
Communication/Parenting style	How did you respond? How did you decide how you would respond?
Intergenerational transmission	How much did your experience as a child influence your actions with your own child (if at all)?
Socio-demographic factors	Were there any other factors involved in your response to your own child?

**Changes to interview questions.** Although the reviewed literature suggested that gender of the child could influence parenting practices, this was not evident in the mothers' responses at first. After the first few interviews had been completed, the following question was added to the interview guide: Do you think your response would be different if your child was a girl/boy? If so, how?

Closely linked to the concept of intergenerational transmission, "personal growth" and "past experiences" were identified by mothers as factors that influenced how they parented their first (older) child versus the younger child who was the focus of these interviews. Thus, a question was added regarding the mothers' age: How do you think your chronological age and/or your personal growth have contributed to your parenting?

### **Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis**

The iterative process of grounded theory promotes the use of early analytic strategies from the beginning of the data collection phase. This process was carried out to guide subsequent data collection and bring forth any theoretical leads that needed to be pursued. This iterative process typically works in a zig-zag manner of going back and forth between data collection and

analysis. The manner of data analysis at this early stage was quite preliminary and became more sophisticated as the process continued.

Once the interviews were conducted, I listened to each audio file at least once in order to start familiarizing myself with the data before transcription. Next, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were read at least once before the coding began. Of the 22 interview audio files, I transcribed 12, and in the interest of time, the remaining 10 were transcribed using a professional transcription service. I read all transcribed files while listening to the audio files to ensure accuracy and maintain familiarity with the data. All transcripts were de-identified and all participants were given pseudonyms before data analysis began. Initial coding for each transcript was carried out, while data collection continued simultaneously.

The data analysis phase of this grounded theory was marked by coding procedures, constant comparative methods, extensive memo-writing, and theoretical sampling.

**Coding.** Coding procedures in grounded theory studies are carried out slightly different in each of the different schools of thought. Glaser's open-ended approach identified substantive coding and theoretical coding as a means to let the data reveal the theory. On the other hand, Corbin and Strauss (1990) identified open coding as the first step of the analysis process, followed by axial coding, and finally selective coding. The axial coding procedures are more specifically considered to be a "coding paradigm" that include conditions, contexts, strategies (including actions and interactions) and consequences.

Charmaz (2014) identifies initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding in her text. She highlights however that axial coding is a purely optional phase and should only be used if the data demand it, so as to not force data into pre-existing categories. Charmaz's coding strategy is more flexible and she believes that the data should guide the coding process.

Coding for this study was carried out in a line-by-line manner utilizing initial, focused and theoretical codes. Table 3.3 provides an example of a section of data that was coded for initial and focused coding. This example illustrates that with each round of coding, a higher level of abstraction was achieved.

**Table 3.3: Example of initial and focused coding**

<b>Data excerpt</b>	<b>Initial codes</b>	<b>Focused codes</b>
no, we were...I was washing dishes and I came to the living room. And something said look at the window and the walls, like something drew my attention to it. And I was like that wasn't. okay so let me walk back in the kitchen and come back to see. I'm like Junior did you do this? Mommy, yes. I'm like, oh my goodness son like what are you thinking about. You have to mark on the paper not the walls and the windows like. you know, I was just so upset.	Doing household tasks	Caregiving tasks
	Noticing child's behavior	Initial interpretations
	Feeling disbelieve - Re-entering room	
	Asking child about behavior	Understanding child's motivation
	Wondering what child is thinking	
	Telling child appropriate behavior	Verbal correction
	Feeling upset	Evaluating self as mother

Although not carried out in its entirety, axial coding was utilized where appropriate to better articulate the analysis associated with the conditions that influence parenting practices. Table 3.4 provides the basis of the axial codes used. As described by Charmaz, the axial codes emerged after the initial and focused coding of approximately 4 transcripts. While additional coding was loosely carried out on these 4 transcripts using the axial codes, the subsequent transcripts were coded using initial, focused, axial, as well as theoretical codes.



**Table 3.4: Axial coding scheme**

<b>Axial coding</b>						
<b>Conditions</b>	Influencing factors	Past experiences; present situation; future hopes and expectations				
<b>Actions/ Interactions</b>	Occupations	Cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.	“Being there”, showing affection, etc.	Helping with school work, disciplining, teaching manners, etc.	Keeping safe, prevent bullying,	Seeking advice, watching others, etc.
<b>Consequences</b>	Relational role	Caregiver	Nurturer	Educator	Protector	Learner

**Constant comparison.** One of the hallmarks of grounded theory studies, and what makes the process an iterative and inductive one, is the use of constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2014). The idea behind constant comparison is to continuously achieve a higher level of abstraction from the data towards theory development. Comparisons were made as part of the analysis process between data and other data, data and codes, codes and other codes, categories and codes, categories and other categories, and core category to all other categories. The rationale for this constant comparison lies in the importance of highlighting relationships among the different parts of the framework developed. The ultimate goal was to develop a conceptual framework that has related categories and the relationships between them can be well articulated using the constant comparative method.

**Memo-writing.** During the entire process of data collection and analysis, many summary, reflexive, and analytic memos were written. The purpose of summary memos was to express my initial thoughts about the interviews. Each summary memo was written within 24 hours of the interview totaling 22 memos. Reflective memos are written to capture the unfolding of the research process, as well as identifying future steps for data collection and analysis. The

reflective memos make the researcher's thought process behind research decisions evident and can serve as a source of an audit trail (see Appendix E). A total of 28 reflective memos were written during the entire research process. Analytic memos are used to develop analytic leads emerging from the data. They can be helpful for creating links between emerging theoretical categories as well as theory development (see Appendix F). Twenty-six analytic memos were written during the analysis phase of the project, leading to decisions about adding additional interview questions, as well as theoretical sampling.

**Theoretical sampling.** Another hallmark of grounded theory studies is the application of theoretical sampling techniques. Theoretical sampling implies that sampling is done based on emergent theoretical categories rather than simply based on the repetition of certain ideas within the data. In other words, sampling is carried out in order to achieve theoretical saturation, rather than data saturation. The purpose of this form of sampling is to develop a theory that has theoretically saturated categories and provides a detailed conceptualization of the phenomenon under study.

Once the conceptual framework began to take shape through the use of axial coding and constant comparison, the categories that required further theoretical saturation were identified and theoretical sampling was then carried out. For this study, this included re-coding or analyzing previously coded data with an emphasis on emerging categories, as well as asking specific questions related to the theoretical categories in the subsequent interviews. For example, the core category of "mothering as a relational role" included categories related to caregiving, protecting, mentoring/education, and learning. However, when specific questions were asked regarding the "multiple hats" worn by mothers, a fifth category related to nurturing emerged. Previous transcripts were then re-coded with an emphasis on the newly emerged category.

Similarly, the category related to contemplation, defined in the next chapter as the active introspection regarding decision-making, appeared to be present during different times during the decision-making process (see Figure 4.2). Once asked about this specifically, it was discovered that contemplation may not only be evident during different times during the mother's decision-making process, but may at times be absent or signify different depths of introspection.

### **Development of Conceptual Framework**

The end goal of most grounded theory studies is to develop a middle-range or substantive theory, or some sort of conceptual framework about the process or phenomenon under study. However, the focus on theory development has been variable among different scholars. Glaser's original conceptualization made a strong argument for the *discovery* of middle-range theories grounded in the data. On the other hand, it has been argued that through the introduction of the axial coding paradigm, Corbin and Strauss have focused their attention on conceptual description rather than theory development. From the constructivist perspective, Charmaz (2014) has iterated that grounded theorizing is a journey and though theory construction is the end goal, it is up to individual researchers to decide how far in the abstraction process they wish to engage.

The most important aspect of whether or not a theory is developed or constructed is the clear articulation of the intentions of the researcher. For this project, the research process and theoretical decision-making strategies were documented in reflective and analytic memos and the goal was to construct a conceptual framework truly grounded in the data. The end results of this project, discussed in the next chapter are: the conceptualization of mothering as a relational role; conditions influencing parenting practices/occupations; and the Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making (TFPD).

## **Rigor in Grounded Theory Studies**

Scholars have argued that the most important way to maintain rigor in grounded theory research is to make thought processes behind analytic and sampling decisions apparent. Researchers must clearly detail the process they used to maintain auditability within their research (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). In addition, the details about how data was abstracted to develop theoretical categories must be described. This process, which was carried out by writing analytic memos, helped to maintain credibility (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003) and emphasize that the constructed framework is in fact grounded in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Finally, researchers must outline the scope of their research as well as transferability of their findings in all published works. This strategy, called “fittingness” (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003) enables other researchers and practitioners to appropriately apply research findings. As a part of this process, it is important to highlight the limitations of the study, as well as future applications of the framework constructed (see Chapter 5).

Other than maintaining rigor, it is also important for grounded theorists to maintain reflexivity and relationality (Hall & Callery, 2001). Reflexivity, which can be maintained by writing reflective memos, enables the researcher to acknowledge that data is socially constructed. Whereas Corbin and Strauss, as well as Glaser, have identified the importance of theoretical sensitivity and the creativity of the researcher with respect to the data analysis process, constructivists argue that this needs to extend into the data collection process as well, in the form of reflexivity. Thus, there is an emphasis on data construction, rather than simply data generation or data collection. In addition, guided by symbolic interactionism and pragmatism, relationality refers to power dynamics and expectations between researcher and participant, with an emphasis on reciprocity and equity. Having a brief idea of the demographics of the population under study and adapting behaviors so that power dynamics not become apparent can help with this. For

example, for all interviews, I dressed appropriately but not extravagantly, avoided professional jargon in communications, and demonstrated active listening skills to make the participants feel comfortable.

**Mothers as study participants.** As a starting point, this study focused on mothers' perspectives on the process of decision-making. Future research should attempt to replicate the findings in other groups of primary caregivers like fathers, grandparents, aunts/uncles and/or foster parents. Additionally, to further explore certain aspects of the conceptual framework, such as historical context related to intergenerational transmission, multigenerational interview studies could also be conducted.

**Sample size.** The sample size for this study was based, in part, on feasibility and time constraints given that this was a dissertation project. Future studies of larger sample sizes, or multiple replication studies of similar sample sizes could help abstract the conceptual model presented here to a substantive theory, and further formal theory.

**Study of typically developing population.** The current project was carried out with mothers of typically developing children, as previous research has outlined that there can be differences in parenting and overall family dynamics when a child has a disability. Future application of the conceptual model with parents of children with disabilities could strengthen the theory development process. Further, the application of the model to decision-making of parents with intellectual or physical disabilities will also help with the generalization and transferability of the study's results.

## **Conclusion**

In keeping with Charmaz's suggestions regarding the literature review process, existing literature was used as sensitizing concepts that guided the data collection process. Simultaneous data collection and analysis guided future data collection as well as aided the constant

comparison method. Through the use of reflective memos, and initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding techniques, theoretical saturation was achieved. Finally, analytic memo-writing and theoretical sampling was carried out to construct a conceptual model that is truly grounded in the data.

To maintain rigor, my priorities during the research process were to write analytic and reflective memos, recognize power dynamics between myself and my participants, stay close to the data for framework construction, achieve theoretical saturation, and clearly articulate the process of research and thought processes behind sampling and analytical decisions in all published work.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

“Nobody’s trying to screw up their kids,” Nicole, a mother of three said as she explained that when one becomes a parent, “you’re doing the best you can”. Mothers use a variety of strategies when engaging in mothering occupations, using the knowledge they possess to the best of their abilities. In considering these strategies from mothers’ perspectives, it is also essential to consider their stories, histories, current family situations, and motivations. The purpose of this study was to construct a conceptual framework of parental decision-making when faced with a child’s behavior challenges. Grounded theory methodology was used in this effort to analyze interview data from twelve mothers. The study explored how mothers managed everyday interactions with their young children, and emphasis was placed on strategies utilized and the factors that impacted the manner in which mothers responded.

The emergent framework proposes that mothers’ responses in diverse settings are best understood as transactional relationships among the mother’s historical context, challenges encountered in the present moment, and predispositions for ways to act (such as a tendency to hold a particular attitude or act in a particular way). The results are presented in three sections within this chapter. The first section is a re-conceptualization of mothering as a relational role instead of a co-occupation. The second section outlines the conditions that influence mothering occupations. Finally, the end product of the study is described in the third section of this chapter – The Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making (TFPD). Case examples and direct quotes are provided throughout. All participant names are pseudonyms.

## **Mothering as a Relational Role**

When one considers the role of a parent, or the things people do as parents, mothers describe engaging in many different occupations. These range from driving their child to basketball practice, helping with homework, cooking a meal for the family, or even doing laundry. Not all parenting occupations described by the mothers are related directly to parent-child interaction, but all are in some way fulfilling the role of a parent. For example, a mother may negotiate a “deal” with her child about getting dessert if he finishes his vegetables. This requires direct communication with the child. However, packing a child’s lunch for school is also a parenting occupation, though may require no direct contact with the child. The findings of this study made evident that there are many different processes that are involved within being a parent requiring direct or indirect contact with the child, or sometimes no contact at all. Additionally, while parenting as a role encompasses many different occupations, the definition of “parenting occupations” can include different things for different people. Some mothers measure being a “good parent” by the number of after-school activities their child is enrolled in. On the other hand, for a family living in poverty, a mother may consider the stable presence of shelter and food on the table the definition of being a good parent. The myriad of mothering occupations, and the motivations behind engaging in these occupations are described in the following sections of this chapter.

This study identified the interconnected and dynamic nature of a woman’s role as a mother, wife, student, daughter, etc., the temporal continuity of these roles, as well as the life events that may change these roles over time. For example, Nicole described her struggle to fulfil the role of a wife due to the overwhelming nature of being a mother. She said,

My husband still expects me to be a wife and a partner to him. I find that, to be honest, probably one of the more difficult things in my life. I have children all day long that need



me you know, homework and shuttling and meals and cleaning. Then he comes home and he wants me to be a wife...

This study also found, however, that the role of mother, itself, contains multiple interconnected roles (see Figure 4.1). The following is a description of the relational roles a mother fulfils and the occupations she engages in to fulfil them.

**Caregiver.** Typically, caregivers provide help to other people in need. In the context of parenting, the term caregiving is often associated with such occupations as bathing, feeding, or dressing a child, and this was also the case for mothers in this study. The mothers in this study described these caregiving tasks in a similar manner, including “potty training” and “getting them ready for bed”. As children aged and gained more self-care skills, the ways in which the mother carried out these caregiver tasks also changed. For example, for a child that could dress him/herself, the mother’s caregiving tasks were related to procuring the child’s clothes, picking out clothes for school, or tying the child’s shoe laces as well as household chores such as laundry. Similarly, for older children that could, for example, feed themselves, the caregiving tasks shifted slightly. In such a situation, instead of feeding her child, a mother’s trip to the grocery store or cooking a healthy dinner for the family were also included within caregiving occupations. For example, providing healthy and nutritious meals are an important part of the caregiving role for Liz, a mother of two. She stated,

So, children are what they eat...when you stop and you do fast food every day, or you just grab, you know, when they want a snack, you give them a snack instead of saying "okay, well what about an apple?" You know, you are what you eat, so that goes back to being a caregiver.

Liz also described caregiving as maintaining the overall well-being of the child. She said,

Caregiving is doing a head to toe check daily. Daily observation. From head to toe, you know. He wakes up in the morning. The first thing I do is, I mean I look at his face, you know as I'm talking to him, I'm checking him out. Making sure, you know, overnight

sicknesses do happen. Rashes happen. You know, that type of thing. So, daily health, I want to call it like a daily health observation as a caregiver.

In general, mothers believed that most, if not all mundane everyday occupations and household chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, school pick-ups and drop-offs or what Cindy, a mother of two, described as fulfilling the child's "basic needs" were carried out for the purpose of fulfilling the caregiver role.

**Nurturer.** Although many actions related to raising and/or caring for a child are associated with nurturing, the mothers in the study described nurturing as having an emotional component. For many mothers, being a nurturer meant showing affection and expressing love and care for their children. In fact, for these mothers, nurturing occupations were the most defining responsibilities of being a parent. For example, Laurel, a mother of two explained,

I think that being an affectionate mom is the most important thing. I want them to know that somebody loves them unconditionally and they don't have to look for that, they don't have to search for it.

Similarly, when asked about what being a good mother means to her, Amanda, a mother of three said, "I guess caring and showing affection and showing them that I love them, and I'm here for them no matter what. Just being here to guide them..." Nurturing occupations such as "kissing away the boo boo", comforting the child when they were tired and cranky, or simply "doing things as a family" were significant as the mothers believed that they provided a sense of belonging for the child. For example, Linda, a mother of two, explained the importance of eating dinner together as a family. She said,

We try to do all that as a family. It's for the children to know that family is important. Your family sticks together no matter what is going on in this world or whatever today. It's your family that's always going to be there and stand by you. It's important for me to let my children know, no matter what goes on in life you should never ever have fear to come to mom and dad for anything.

**Educator.** The role of educator encompasses many different aspects of parent-child interactions. These range from teaching a child to brush his or her teeth, helping a child with school work, or correcting a child's behavior. The end goal of fulfilling this role is always to bring about some positive change in the child's behavior. For example, Amanda, a mother of three, tries to model the behavior that she wants to instill in her three-year-old daughter. She said,

...I don't want them to think that people can just talk to them however they want to. I'm trying to teach them how to be respectful. If I want that respect, then I have to show them how to do it.

Similarly, Linda also values the importance of teaching her children to be respectful. She said,

We've got to teach our children to respect not only themselves but their belongings. If they respect themselves and other people around them, their belongings in this world, everyone and everything will be so much easier and so much happier, and their toys and belongings would last them a lot longer if they respect them.

As another example, Anita, a mother of four, explained that teaching manners at home is very important to her, so that the child knows acceptable ways of behaving when he goes out into the world. She said,

...when I sleeping in the room, you're not allowed to come in. Or don't just walk in my room. You have to knock on the door. When you knock on the door I tell you come in. When you just open the door, I send you right back outside. Go back out and close my door and knock. By the time you go back to somebody's house, you're not just going to walk in a person's house. You're going to knock before you enter...

For all mothers, disciplining their children or correcting their behavior is always carried out to fulfil the role of educator. The goal is always to teach their child a better way to respond, think or act, and to engage in behaviors that are appropriate according to the mother.

**Protector.** Keeping their children safe is another very important part of being a parent for all mothers. Pam, a mother of two daughters, would put both her children in the grocery cart while shopping. Recently, however, she noticed that her older child was too big for the cart and

she said, “I was really afraid I was going to push it and have her...go out.” Pam believed that safety was extremely important and thus started using a kid-friendly cart with a car attached to it for this reason. As a different example, Emily, a mother of two, explained that “the new girl's a bully”. She said that she always watches her children play outside through the window because one of the new neighbor's daughter teases her son. Finally, current events related to neighborhood safety also factor into the necessity of keeping children safe. Linda informed me of a recent drive-by shooting in her neighborhood and said,

It's just important for us to make sure that our children are safe and feel safe not only at home, feel comfortable at home and feel as safe as possible in the world, but the things that go on in this world I know it's hard. I'm even scared. I'm forty years old, and I'm even scared...

Whether it is prevention of bullying, or ensuring the child does not eat foods he is allergic to, all mothers discussed what could be described as a natural maternal instinct of being protective of their children.

**Learner.** “There's not a manual to being a parent,” said Kristin, a mother of two. She went on, “there's nothing that can prepare you for parenting. You never know what your child is going to be like. Everybody's different...” All the mothers in the study expressed this opinion in one way or another. They described strategies of educating themselves to become a better parent, which ranged from trial and error to formal parenting classes and everything in between. For example, Linda, said that she asks other people for advice. When discussing her daughter, she said, “I listen to everybody else's advice, but the main person I really listen to is her doctor because her doctor knows and what her doctor says to me I know is the best thing for her.” In comparison, Emily described using more trial and error and learning from her past experiences. She said that she takes away her four-year-old son's hand held video game console as a form of discipline, because “everything else didn't work”. As another example, Liz, was the director of a

child care center for many years. Liz believes that her past experiences and training in child health and safety contributed to her skills as a mother. She said,

Standards. Minimum Standards are embedded in my head...Minimum Standards is the basics, and it's about that thick of a book that you would follow for rules and regulations. A good 200 pages, but it's called Minimum Standards. It's the basics of getting by...Child ratios. Health and safety. Sanitation. Daily routines. First aid...

Many mothers also described watching other people's parenting strategies and making judgment calls about whether or not they would engage in such occupations with their own children.

Nicole recalls,

I can remember sitting there watching my niece play with her spaghetti, like play, play, play with it at dinner. I remember having the thought, 'My kids are never going to do that. They're not going to play with their food.'

In fact, Nicole informed me that the manner in which some of her friends parented their children led to the disruption of her social relationships with them. She said, "Certainly relationships have gone by the wayside because I can't be around them with their kids because of the way they parent..."

**Summary.** It is important to recognize that the above categories are not mutually exclusive, as every mother in this study described engaging in each of the occupations and fulfilling all of these roles either singularly or in concert with each other. For example, Gina, a mother of two described getting her children ready for school and transporting them to and from the bus stop as mundane daily chores, which would imply fulfilling the role of caregiver. She says, "it has to be done, you do it every day." On the other hand, Nicole described the time that she helps her daughter get dressed as an opportunity to teach her to be kind. She tells her five-year-old daughter, every day, "go to school, help somebody. Be nice to somebody." In this scenario, Nicole is enfolding her caregiver role with the role of an educator. Additionally, Cindy, mother of two, in describing the overwhelming nature of managing these different roles, said,

definitely different hats. I think that sometimes we forget to switch hats, we forget to let other people help us with those hats. Not because we don't trust other people but because we know how to get it done quicker and right the first time, and because we don't want to miss anything. That's my big thing, I don't want anybody else to do (things) because I don't want to miss anything...I think we forget to share those hats. People are happy to help but sometimes (we) don't allow it when they offer...

These subtle differences in how the mothers fulfil their overlapping roles, and more importantly the conditions that influence the occupations they engage in are discussed in the next section.

### **Conditions Influencing Mothering Occupations**

In fulfilling their relational roles, mothers engage in many occupations. The factors that influence the management of multiple roles as well as the engagement in multiple occupations are best understood through the exploration of a mother's past, present and future conditions.

**Past.** A mother's past experiences, including her childhood memories, school or college level training, as well as the transmission of intergenerational knowledge, shape her predispositions or tendencies to think and act in particular ways. Many mothers recognize that who they are today is a product of the experiences they had in their past. This historical context is an indicator of why and how a mother chooses to engage in certain occupations, as well as how she responds to and interacts with her child.

The transmission of intergenerational knowledge plays a part in how a mother's past influences her decision making in the present. For example, Amanda stated, "I have a tendency to yell a lot at my kids and she's so little I don't want to make that a habit..." and then in relating that to experiences with her own mother stating, "the yelling I think I picked up from her, I think that's where I get it from..." Amanda remembers being afraid of her mother and hopes that her children will not fear her in the same way. Similarly, Nicole talked about childhood experiences with her father. She said, "I remember specific instances growing up where my dad would ... He had kind of a temper, and I would say I kind of do too, which I didn't know I had until I had

kids.” The transmission of knowledge, especially related to emotionally charged situations in one’s childhood, is one of the most salient features of the mothers’ past experiences, which according to them, influences their parenting. Although mothers also shared positive experiences from their childhood, they reported that their parenting was most often influenced by their negative memories.

Other past experiences, not necessarily transmitted intergenerationally, also influence the development of the mothers’ perceptions about their parenting roles, and in turn influence how they respond to their children. Cindy explained that since her mother worked a lot, she cared for her younger brothers as a teenager. She believes that this past experience has shaped her capacity to be nurturing and compassionate towards her own children. Similarly, Liz believes that her experiences as a director of a day care center have made her more vigilant to spot any signs of illness or injury in her own children. It is also important to note the impact of socio-economic and cultural differences on these mothers’ upbringing, and how those also affect a mother’s responses. Anita, who was born and raised in West Africa, was unable to attend school due to financial restrictions, and many days was only able to eat one meal as a child. She moved to the United States to provide her children with the education and experiences that she was unable to have in childhood. She is acutely aware of the stark differences in how she was raised and how she is now able to raise her own children. She also consciously emphasizes these differences to her children. Similarly, Sam explained that she found the customs and traditions in her country of origin reprehensible, so she chose to follow a different parenting style. She said,

In (country), most of the people beat the children. Some of the people they just beat and kill their baby. I don't like that. Most of the people they just give birth to the baby, and throw them to the jungle...I don't know why they do that... some of the people, they did not marry each other, and they will become pregnant, and they just, nobody accept(s) them due to the baby... I think that I don't have to beat the baby when they do naughty things. We have to just say, ‘no, don’t do like that,’ but you don't have to beat.

For some mothers, past experiences also include discipline strategies they have previously tried with their child that influence whether they wish to use them again. For example, Emily knows that when her two-year-old son is tired and begins to have a meltdown, distraction works best. She senses her son's mood and distracts him using the photos on her cell phone to avoid a tantrum. Similarly, Cindy successfully used time-out with her older son when he was younger, but the strategy does not seem to work with his younger sibling. She tried to use a familiar strategy such as time-out because it had always worked in the past and it was habitual. However, she now has to find alternative strategies either using other past experiences or based on the present situation to discipline her younger son.

**Present.** A mother's situation as a whole is a very important factor in her decision-making. Not only does a mother need to assess the immediate environment related to an interaction with her child, but she also pays attention to her overall family situation, current events in the community, and her worldview of good parenting. For example, when Emily closely watches her child playing outside she takes into consideration the fact that her child is susceptible to be picked on, that there is a bully in the neighborhood, and that it is her responsibility as a good mother to protect her child. For Amanda, her relationship with her husband influences how she responds to her children. She said,

It depends on what type of mood I'm in and how easily I can be occupied with what she's got going on and how to respond. I know if I'm in a bad mood with my husband that just disrupts my whole day. I do take it out on the kids because they're just like him. They act just like him and look just like him and talk just like him.

She went on to describe how many different things in her situation can influence how she responds, stating, "Yeah there's not really one thing. The dogs, them just sitting here and whining all day. He just doesn't like to be in his cage so just the whining and the running around. It all plays together."



Additionally, the mothers discussed maternal instinct and how that plays a part in their decision-making. They do believe that their past influences their present, and that there are some things that may develop over time, but a mother's current skill set and instincts are the ones that influence day to day decision-making in the moment. Liz described this in relation to a mother's nurturing spirit and her belief that it is not something that can be learned. She said,

that definitely doesn't come from the upbringing, and I don't think that, I mean you can learn techniques on how to be more nurturing, or studies and education. But really it's a hard thing... it's just one of those things that you can't really, maybe you can develop over time better, but if you don't have it already, it's hard to learn it.

The mothers also stressed that not only their own personality but also their child's influences their decision-making. This was most evident when the mothers compared their children to each other. Pam stated,

in terms of discipline ... I don't know if it's an older child thing, I don't know if it's her personality, but she follows the line, generally, pretty quickly. You issue her with the consequences, and she will generally do what she's supposed to do.

Pam also described her personality and situational awareness of being judged by others in her environment as influencing her actions in the moment. When describing her visits to the grocery store with her children, she said,

this is my personality I guess, like, go ahead, I'll take all of your smiles and like, 'Wow, what a great mom.' Then when they're melting down, I'll be like, 'I bet you feel good about your parenting right now. Good for you.'

Finally, current events such as neighborhood crime and violence also influence a mother's decision-making. As described above, Linda's concern for her children's safety due to a recent drive-by shooting in her neighborhood has prompted use of extra TV time instead of allowing them to play outside.

**Future.** For all mothers, the goals of parenting are related to a better future. Some mothers' goals are to be a better parent, and some aim for their children's lives to be better than their own. Many mothers strove to have successful relationships with their children, especially when they perceived their own relationships with their parents as contentious. Laurel uses her memories of past experiences with her mother to try and shape the future. She said,

I remember being even a teenager and having a miscarriage at 19 and I hid it from my mother...I don't want that for mine. Like I want her (or) any (of) my kids to be able to say, you know, tell me anything...Not be scared that I'm gonna react in anger or judge them or whatever the case may be...

Mothers then try to change their behavior towards their children based on these childhood experiences, but the purpose of that change, and altering the actual physical behavior is often motivated by emotions. Kristin described an incident from her childhood about sneaking out of the house without permission. She said,

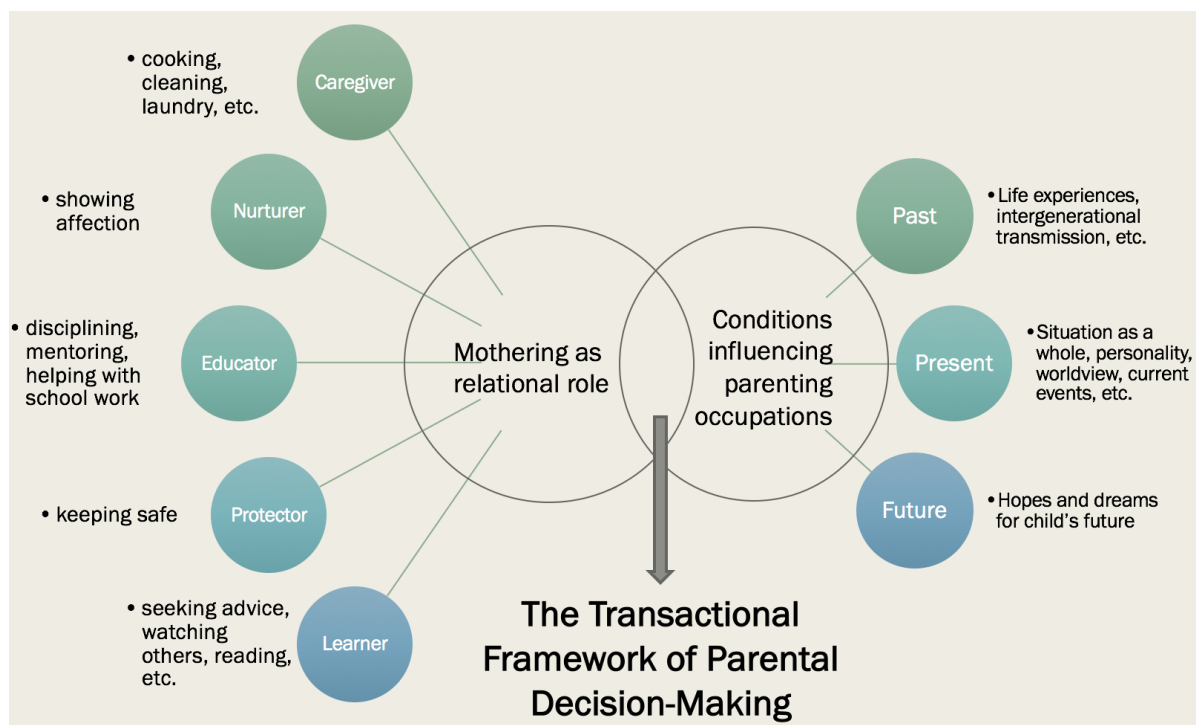
I remember sneaking to my high school homecoming in 9th grade because my parents wouldn't let me. I remember telling them that we had a band trip and we weren't going to be back until later. That way I could spend the whole day getting ready. I got my hair done. My best friend's sister did hair so she did our hair, she didn't charge us anything. I stole my mom's marine corps ball dress from years ago. I tried it on beforehand, stuffed it in a backpack... That's what I don't want my kids to feel like they have to do that. I try to be different so I give them a little bit more leniency.

Laurel and Kristin both try to parent differently from their own parents, not only because they think their parents' discipline strategies were harsh, but also because of how it made them feel. These mothers do not want their children to have negative associations with their parenting strategies as they do.

Another motivation for teaching children right from wrong, and manners in general is related to a mother's desire to prepare the child for a successful future. Linda explained this in relation to her daughter wanting to get her way all the time,

She thinks she's supposed to have whatever she wants and do whatever she wants, and that's not real life. We have to prepare them for real life. It's important for them to know that lying, cheating, stealing is not something ... It's not okay, and they have to understand the consequences that might come along with that kind of stuff.

**Summary.** Although presented as separate constructs, it is important to understand that a mother's historical context, socio-cultural situation, and goals for the future are intricately interconnected to form the very existence of the person that she is, and the mother that she is striving to become. Figure 4.1 depicts the mother as a *caregiver*, *nurturer*, *educator*, *protector*, and *learner*. In fulfilling these roles, a mother engages in parenting occupations that are influenced by her *past*, *present*, and *future*. A mother is faced with many moments of decision-making on a daily basis. It is important to understand the mother as a whole before exploring how she makes decisions. The next section describes the process of decision-making undertaken by mothers through the Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making. This framework is a depiction of the process of decision-making from the mothers' perspectives.



**Figure 4.1: Mothering as relational role**

## **The Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making**

As a mother engages in parenting occupations influenced by her past, present and future conditions, she is faced with multiple scenarios where she must make decisions. These decisions can range from what to prepare for dinner in order to fulfil her role as a caregiver, or which after school activity to enroll her child in to fulfil her role as an educator. There are also “in the moment” decisions that a mother must make when interacting with her child. The focus of this study was on those decisions that pertain to how a mother decides to respond to the child’s undesirable behavior. The emergent framework presented here is focused on such decision-making.

The next section of this chapter provides an in-depth examination of the processes that comprise the emergent framework. As this process is understood from the mothers’ perspectives, it is important to keep the mother, informed by her past, present, and future conditions at the heart of this framework. It is important to view the mothers’ situations as a whole and for this reason, the framework represents the transactional nature of the mother’s fulfillment of her relational roles.

Although presented in a somewhat sequential manner in the following text, it is important to note that this framework is highly iterative and dynamic. The process most always begins with a mother’s interpretation of events, and then moves through her conscious and subconscious thought processes for execution of an intervention and, finally, the evaluation of that intervention; however, it is possible that *contemplation* or the active introspection regarding decision-making be present before, between, or after any of these phases. At each phase of the process, a mother is utilizing her past, present, and future conditions to navigate through the situation successfully. It is also important to note that for any given scenario, a mother may go through these phases multiple times before achieving her desired result.

In discussing each phase below, examples and direct quotations are included to assist in conceptualizing the emergent framework. To illustrate these phases further, Appendix G provides a visual description of the framework as it pertains to an optimal case scenario, discussed further in chapter 5.

**Is it necessary to intervene?** One of the first determinations in the decision-making process is most often associated with identifying a situation that requires a mother's attention and figuring out whether or not to intervene. During this time, mothers try to understand the child's behavior and its motivation. The decision-making processes involved during this time are related to a mother noticing the child's behavior, deciding if the behavior is a problem that needs to be addressed, and deciding to intervene.

***Noticing the behavior.*** Mothers typically notice a child's behavior while carrying out one of the many parenting occupations described above. It is possible that the behavior is brought to the mother's attention by the child, or it could be a behavior that the mother notices on her own. For example, Gina noticed that her son was drawing on the wall because he called her name while she was cooking in order to show his picture. Whereas, Linda noticed that her daughter was likely pushing her brother or taking away his toy because she heard him crying while she was cooking in the kitchen. Mothers may also notice a behavior by sensing the subtle changes in the child's mood. Cindy explained that she knew her son was having a bad day because he woke up cranky. Later that morning her son refused to put on his shoes for school and she knew that a tantrum was imminent. It is important to note that the behaviors to be noticed can be overt, like seeing the markings on the wall, or more subtle such as sensing that the child is in a bad mood. While caring for her child, a mother is constantly vigilant towards extreme as well as subtle changes in the child's behavior.

*Is this a problem?* Once the mother notices the child's behavior, she must discern if the behavior is problematic, or one that may resolve itself without intervention. This is the first layer of decision-making. There are multiple factors that influence this level of decision-making. The first is related to whether this behavior has been a problem in the past. If a mother knows that a very big tantrum typically starts with a simple refusal to put on shoes, as was the case with Cindy's son, she is more likely to deem the situation as a problem. In contrast, Linda explained that her daughter often plays slightly rough with her brother, and it does not always escalate into a fight, so she kept an eye on the situation, but did not immediately consider it to be a problem.

The second factor is related to the broader physical and social environment in which the situation is occurring. Emily described a situation in the store where her son wanted a toy that was too expensive. She immediately removed him from the situation because she knew that people were watching and judging them while they argued. However, when her son wanted to play with her phone at home, and she needed to use her phone, her son had another meltdown. She said, "when we're at home, I just let him have at it." She considered the situation in the store to be more of a problem than when she was at home with her child, even though the child exhibited the same behavior. There are obvious discrepancies here regarding what a mother considers to be a problem based on being in public versus private. In Emily's scenario, her perceptions of being judged by others, influenced whether she considered the behavior to be problematic.

It is also noteworthy that what one mother considers to be problematic, may not be considered a problem by another mother. For example, Liz tends to become upset with her two-year-old son when he does not finish his dinner. She explained that as the director of a child care center she gained knowledge about healthy nutrition and making sure the child has a consistent

mealtime routine, thus, it is important to her that her child eat healthy foods. In contrast, Pam believes that if her daughter is hungry, she will eat; if her child refuses to eat, Pam simply removes her plate after dinner time is over instead of engaging in a conflict with her child. In this example, Liz seems to view her child's refusal to eat as a problem because of the nutritional implications; however, Pam does not seem focused on the nutritional implications but rather on whether this is a "battle worth fighting" with her child. When probed further on this issue, it was revealed that Pam used a strategy similar to Liz for her older daughter, and found it to be very tedious and time consuming. For "the sake of my sanity", she said, for her younger daughter, she tried this new strategy, and it has worked very well. Her younger child has likely learned that if she does not eat what is presented to her, she will likely be hungry later on. Pam went on to explain that this could be because her daughters are very different from each other. Where her oldest was a "picky eater" and displayed more problem behaviors related to mealtimes, her younger one is "more laid back". Pam believes that she mirrors her children's behaviors and personality traits in order to determine whether a behavior is problematic or not. This example signifies a transaction among the behaviors of the child and the mother, as well as the mother's past, present and future perceptions of what she considers problematic. For Liz, the focus was on the future of her child's health outcomes, based on her existing knowledge of child nutrition, and for Pam it was related to past experiences with her older child and a desire to maintain her "sanity" during the present situation.

***Deciding to intervene.*** Another layer of decision-making is related to whether or not the mother should intervene. During this phase, the mother considers the child's motivation for the behavior, as well as the conditions that brought on the child's behavior. Cindy determined that her son's refusal to put on his shoes was a "control issue". She believed that he was upset

because he was not presented with a choice as to which shoes he would prefer to wear. She took this into consideration when deciding how to proceed. Similarly, when Sam asked her son to sit at the table for dinner, he began to cry and lay down on the floor. Sam made the determination during this phase that her son was hungry and sleepy. Thus, understanding the child's perspective influences a mother's decision regarding how to proceed.

Also during this phase, a mother is making a determination about whether she needs to intervene at all. This is most prominent in cases such as Linda's where she kept an eye on the situation of her two children playing with each other, and knew that she may have to intervene if the situation escalates. Apart from considering the child's motivations, a mother also considers her own situation. A mother's decision to intervene may be influenced by her ability to carry out the proposed intervention. For example, Nicole recalled an incident when she was driving her son and daughter home from a birthday party. Nicole needed to stop by the grocery store for milk, when her son and daughter got into an argument over a toy in the back seat of her car. Nicole wanted them to stop because she was having a headache at the time, so the behavior was clearly a problem for her. She initially thought she would tell the children that they could not stop at the grocery store, where they always get a cookie. This was not a feasible solution however, because Nicole needed to purchase milk for the home. Since they had almost arrived at the grocery store, Nicole decided not to intervene and hoped that the behavior would resolve itself once they reached the store.

**How to achieve desired result?** When faced with a child's problematic behavior, a mother must consider which of her intervention options is likely to be most successful. Her goal is to choose an intervention strategy that will help achieve her desired result. Mothers explained that when presented with a child's behavior requiring their immediate attention, their thoughts



and actions in response to the child's behavior unfold in a matter of mere seconds or less. During this very short period of time, the mother's instincts and predispositions to think and act influenced by her past, present, and future conditions are most utilized. These predispositions are best understood by viewing the situation as a holistic experience. In other words, all past, present, and future conditions influence the thoughts and actions during this phase, and mothers admit that much of this experience is happening at a subconscious level. This is evident from the mothers' acknowledgment that in the moment they are not actively thinking about what to do. Rather, they tend to rely on their predispositions to think and act in certain ways and respond with an embodied action, discussed in the next sub-section. However, it is important to recognize that some mothers do engage in active selection of interventions depending on the situation.

When considering how to achieve the desired result, a mother may actively consider what has worked in a similar situation in the past. She is also aware of strategies that have not worked in the past so may employ some trial and error techniques. She also considers the situation as a whole: Is the child's safety a concern? Are there people around that will judge me? Do I have time to address this right now? Should I give in to the child's demand? These are just some of the questions that the mother considers during the decision-making process. In answering these questions, the mother also keeps in mind the consequences of her chosen response to her child's behavior. For example, when Amanda's three-year-old daughter used a marker to draw on her sheets and pillow cover, Amanda's first response was to remove the bedding and wash it. She did this because her husband would be upset with Amanda if there were marks on the sheets. Amanda made a judgment call that instead of disciplining her daughter right away, she must first attend to the laundry, before her husband got home from work. In a similar situation, when Gina's son was using a marker to write on the walls, her first response

was to take the marker away from him because she did not want him to continue the damage. Gina was most concerned about the fact that this was a rental home and that she would have to pay for this damage. While Amanda's decision-making was influenced by her relationship with her husband, Gina's was influenced by her financial situation. In both situations, the children were engaging in the same behavior, but different conditions influenced the choices mothers made when figuring out how to achieve their desired result.

Also during this phase, the mothers acknowledge that most of the decision-making is likely happening on a subconscious level. Typically, the mother uses a set of preexisting dispositions to think and act in response to a child's behavior. These predispositions are embedded within the mother's behavioral repertoires and have become habits. Mothers may tend to fall back on these habits instead of actively thinking about what to do. Many mothers described this back-up plan as, "I just did what I normally do," or "in the moment, I'm not thinking," or "it's an automatic thing," or "that's just my personality". These predispositions are most often related to the mother's own childhood experiences, or her ways of being. Pam explained that it has always been a challenge for her to have a face to face confrontation regarding topics of disagreement. Instead of "hashing it out", she always retreated to the privacy of her bedroom after a disagreement with her brother as a child, or a confrontation with her parents as a teenager. She believes that she continues this form of communication style when interacting with her children as well. When her daughter turned off all the lights and left her younger sister in an upstairs bedroom, Pam was very angry and decided that she needed to remove herself from the situation. She did not wish to spend anymore face-to-face time with her daughter, so her husband carried out the bedtime routine. She said,

I was really frustrated and it takes a lot of my ... Her bedtime routine takes a lot of my time, so I have to do hair, teeth, jammies, 'pick out your clothes for tomorrow, what do

you want for lunch?’ Reading, you sit there and read for 15 minutes, 20 minutes, and then lay with me a while ... I didn't want to give her anymore time. I was mad and I was done.

In contrast, Nicole tries to consider her options when she first notices the behavior, but if the behavior escalates, she begins to consider less how to tailor her response to the situation because she has grown frustrated. She then uses a more reactive (or generalized) intervention strategy, which is yelling. In other words, she moves from consciously considering her choices to falling back on habits. She stated,

In the beginning I have more of an ability to control myself and think about how I want to handle this. You're going to go here and you're going to go there but then when it's happened again, and again, and again, that's when I really get to where I just snap.

**Embodied action.** It is evident that the thoughts and actions that are undertaken during decision-making are different for different mothers, depending on their past, present, and future conditions. First, the perceptions of what comprises a problematic behavior is different for different mothers. Next, based on their childhood memories and embedded behavior repertoires, mothers' choices of interventions are also different. A mother's understanding of the child's motivations, as well as their own motivations for executing a discipline strategy, also vary. Finally, the type of strategy to be executed is dependent on the mother's situation as a whole, and her in-the-moment ability to respond successfully. The social embodied experience of a mother's decision-making process as a whole includes social, cultural, physical, cognitive, and reflective components. These components cannot and should not be separated from each other if a complete understanding of the human experience is to be achieved. As such, the thoughtful components of the decision-making process described above, as well as the active components of executing an intervention strategy described below can best be understood as embodied actions undertaken by the mother.

Based on what the mother believes will help achieve her desired result, she carries out the intervention. This could include ignoring the child's behavior all together, a verbal correction, or a physical act.

**No intervention.** Sometimes, the decision regarding intervention is that the mother will ignore the behavior. Although it may appear as though the mother has not noticed the behavior, or that she does not consider it to be a problem, it is entirely possible that she chooses to purposefully ignore the behavior. A mother may deliberately choose to ignore a behavior due to several reasons. It is possible that in the mothers' previous experience, ignoring the behavior made it stop. Kristin explained that sometimes her daughter would lie on the couch and cry "for no reason". At first Kristin tried to comfort her daughter and ask her what is wrong in an attempt to make the crying stop. However, she learned, through trial and error, that her daughter exhibits such behavior when she is sleepy, and if left alone, her daughter either falls asleep or calms herself down while resting on the couch. It is also possible that the mother is otherwise occupied with a different task and prioritizes that task over correcting the child's behavior. As described in the example above, Amanda prioritized washing the dirty sheets due to her personal relationship with her husband, and ignored her daughter's behavior. She knew she wanted to correct the behavior, but "now was not the time". Another reason for not intervening could be related to the feasibility of carrying out an intervention. This is evident in Nicole's experience described above regarding stopping at the grocery store for milk.

**Verbal intervention.** In most situations, a mother's first response is a verbal correction of the child's undesirable behavior. This includes statements such as, "don't do that" or "finish your dinner" or "be nice to your sister" etc. Mothers explained that some of the time these verbal corrections are sufficient to alter a child's behavior. Other times, when verbal correction is not

successful, a mother returns to the preparation phase to come up with a different strategy. For some mothers this involved simply stating the verbal correction in a louder tone of voice, or using a different statement, until the child complies. An additional type of verbal correction is one that implies a future action of some sort. These include statements such as, “if you keep doing that, you will go in time-out” or “if you don’t stop that, there will be no cookie for you later”.

***Physical intervention.*** For some mothers, and in some situations, physical correction is the second form of intervention, once a verbal correction has not been successful. In other situations, physical correction may be the first form of intervention. Physical correction implies the actual use of one’s hand and/or body to make physical changes in the environment in order to correct behavior. In such situations, mothers may use statements instructing a child to make said physical change, such as, “go to your room” or “go to the time-out chair”. Additionally, physical corrections also include things such as taking away an electronic device or preferred toy for a period of time, preventing a child from engaging in a preferred activity such as watching TV or playing with friends, and more extreme forms of physical correction may include spanking or hitting the child. On the other hand, some mothers also give their child a toy to play with or an electronic device as a form of distraction from the undesirable behavior.

**Was the intervention successful?** During a problematic situation between mother and child, the mother executes a correction and evaluates right away whether it worked or not. She then may go back and forth multiple times, considering all the factors described above to ultimately achieve her desired result, i.e. the child stops the undesirable behavior, or the child complies with the mother’s request. In a given scenario it is possible to go through these decision-making phases multiple times before the mother is able to achieve the desired result.

***Sense of achievement.*** The purpose of evaluating a mother's intervention is not necessarily to label the mother's actions as appropriate or inappropriate, but simply to gauge whether the mother was able to achieve the desired result. The sense of achievement for a mother is an indicator of whether she needs to go through the decision-making process again or in a different manner. For example, Sam's two-year-old son loves to open the pantry closet and play with the bag of rice. Sam typically has to repeatedly tell him to stay out of the pantry. However, on the most recent occasion, after two or three instances of verbal correction, she physically picked him up and teased him, "now how will you go in there?" For Sam, it was a battle of the wills, and she won in that scenario.

***Contemplation.*** Contemplation is the active introspection regarding decision-making. There are many different levels of introspection undertaken by mothers. They can range from a brief moment of evaluating their own response to their child instead of simply feeling a sense of achievement, to a much deeper appraisal of their decision-making capabilities. In addition, contemplation can occur for mothers at any point within the decision-making process. Below is an explanation of the different types of contemplation that mothers engage in.

For some mothers, especially those that are insightful about their own tendencies, their family situations, and their historical context, contemplation of decision-making takes place even before an adverse behavior presents itself. In such situations, the mother has thought about how she will react to a certain scenario in anticipation of the child's behavior. One such example, influenced by historical context, is Laurel's strong beliefs about her daughters going to a friend's house for a sleepover. Laurel's sister was molested as a child, and this historical context guides her protective instincts towards her own daughters. She said,

If you want to have a sleepover, great. Sleep over here... I don't let anyone, any man watch my kids. They have three people that watch them. My husband's sister, their

grandmother, my mom... And a young lady I've known for a long time. That's it ... Because you never know. You can leave them for 10, 15 minutes and something can happen and I don't want to say I didn't know. I don't want to be like I'm sorry I didn't know. No, I should know. You're a mom. You should know...

Laurel had decided even before she had any children, and discussed with her husband how she would handle the situation, if it ever came up. Further, when she became pregnant, Laurel also discussed with her husband the violence she witnessed in the home during her childhood. She was raised in an abusive environment, and so was her husband. For this reason, she believed that, as parents, they should make a conscious decision to never lay a hand on each other or their children.

Another example, related to historical context, was Nicole's desire to do things differently with her children. She said,

I've always thought about ... There's a few things I want to do differently. I want to talk to my kids about money more. I want to be more involved in their academic decisions. My parents were totally hands off...

In contrast, influenced more so by her natural tendencies, Amanda is consciously trying not to yell at her children. She said, "I tell myself, next time this happens, I need to leave the room for a few seconds..." These active introspective decisions took place for the mothers before their child had exhibited the problematic behavior. This form of contemplation is best understood as "having a plan" or knowing what to do if and when a behavior presents itself.

Contemplation for some mothers takes place after interpretation of an exhibited behavior. In such a situation, a mother actively thinks about her options regarding intervention instead of falling back on her preferred modes of thought and action. Most mothers who contemplate their decision-making during this time, do so in an attempt to break an intergenerational trend. For example, Amanda recalled that her mother used to pull her hair when she got angry with her. She remembers feeling scared of her mother, and does not wish for her children to fear her in the

same way. She said, “I don't want to pull their hair, I don't want to hurt them or make them scared of me.” Instead, she makes a conscious decision as soon as she is presented with a negative behavior to tell herself that she will not pull her child’s hair. Similar to her contemplation in anticipation of a behavior regarding yelling, Amanda follows through with that conscious decision-making during the preparation phase.

During this phase, the contemplation is also related to catching yourself, or stopping yourself from acting in a way that is habitual. Gina’s first instinct was to spank her son for writing on the walls, but she stopped herself from acting on that instinct. She said,

I wanted to beat him, to be honest. But it’s like, no, okay I have to take ten steps back and think about this. I talked to him and I explained to him that you cannot write on the walls, you cannot write on the windows, you have to mark on paper.

During this time, the active introspection is about finding alternative strategies in order to break the habit of using non-preferred strategies.

Finally, the contemplation that occurs during this time is also related to the mother’s situation as a whole and her ability to carry out certain interventions. This is evident in Nicole’s example of actively thinking about whether she will be able to follow through if she told her children that they could not stop at the grocery store. She described this as “weighing options”, to achieve the desired result in the most effective manner.

If a mother is unable to correct herself or stop herself from reacting in a manner that she is trying to avoid, introspection about the execution of an intervention can take place immediately after or during intervention. As mentioned above, Amanda has consciously decided not to pull her child’s hair. On one occasion however, she reported,

I think one time I was really, really upset with (child) and I think one time I actually did pull his hair. I just grabbed it and yanked it not even realizing. I'm like, ‘I'm so sorry. I will never pull your hair again.’



Amanda immediately realized that she resorted to an intergenerationally transmitted automatic behavior, a habit she is trying to break, so she stopped herself. Another example of introspection during this phase is related to mothers that may not be able to follow through with a verbal correction. For example, Linda told her younger daughter that she could not eat ice cream until she finished her vegetables. When Linda brought out the ice cream after dinner, her older daughter remarked that her sister could not eat any ice-cream because she had two carrots still remaining on her plate. After brief introspection, Linda decided to adjust her intervention plan and stated, “I think she has eaten plenty, it’s okay if she eats some ice cream”. In this situation, the contemplation was brief, but it was utilized in order to renegotiate the execution of the intervention.

Some mothers contemplate or reflect on what they did as part of self-evaluation. This evaluation can take place soon after the incident or even at a much later time, and relates to a mother’s introspection about how they could have done things differently. When recalling the incident with her son wanting an expensive toy in the store, Emily said,

I should have waited, and I thought about it after: I should have waited until after I got to the register and got rang up and then put it back. I didn't think about it. I know to do that now. But I didn't think about it... He slept on the way home, I guess his fit was that bad, he was tired. And I was just like, ‘Oh, next time, I'm going to wait until I get to the register, wait until I'm going out the door and then have (child) put it back’... You're trying to think of a different way it could have been handled.

Similarly, Gina said that she tries to think about everything that happened during the day before she goes to bed. It is a struggle for her to assess and check her own actions but she attempts to introspect as much as she can. She said,

sometimes I don't go to bed maybe till 12 o'clock, because I wanna take an hour to myself... I can sit back and think, why did I act that way?... I'm not thinking at the time, I'm just gonna say what I'm gonna say, and I'm gonna think about it later and then it's gonna be, ‘ummm did I say that really?’ and then it’s like, ‘did I mean to say that?’ I don’t know what I meant to say, you know so it’s just hard...

Gina's statement describes well the mothers that may not be as insightful in the moment, but later attempt to understand their own behavior in relation to their child.

**Summary.** Although discussed in a sequential manner, it is important to note that this framework is highly iterative and dynamic. The process most always begins with a mother's interpretation of events, and moves through her conscious and subconscious decision-making processes, and then leads to an embodied action and evaluation of that action; however, it is possible that contemplation or active introspection is present before, between, or after any of the decision-making processes. It is notable that for some mothers and/or for some decisions, contemplation was not present at any phase of the process, or very minimally present in their day to day lives. This was made evident by the mothers' admittance that the first time some of them ever engaged in introspection about their decision-making was when I asked them questions about it. It is important to recognize that informed by their past, present and future conditions, these mothers may have fewer opportunities for higher level introspection. This could be due to their level of education, their overwhelming and dynamic family situation, or the sheer lack of time. It is also important to keep in mind that in many instances this decision-making process is carried out in a matter of a few seconds or less, given how quickly a child's misbehavior can occur and be resolved. Additionally, for any given scenario, a mother may go through the process multiple times before achieving her desired result. As such, a visual model of the Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making illustrating an optimal decision-making scenario is included as Appendix G, and discussed in the next chapter. This model is especially relevant for practical implications of the findings of this study.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the results of this study in three sections. First, I highlighted that even though a mother's role intersects with her other social roles, such as wife, student, daughter, etc., the mothering role itself is a confluence of multiple interconnected roles. By understanding *mothering as a relational role*, I described the myriad occupations that mothers engage in to fulfil the roles of *caregiver*, *nurturer*, *educator*, *protector*, and *learner* (see Figure 4.1). Also depicted in Figure 4.1 are the conditions that influence a mother's occupations. Past experiences, such as education or training, observations of others, as well as intergenerational transmission of knowledge influence mothers' ways of being, and shape their decisions for how to engage with their children. Similarly, a mother's current situation as a whole also influences her everyday thoughts and actions. These could be related to balancing multiple social roles, considering financial restraints, or simply being frustrated by lack of sleep or a barking dog. Finally, all mothers stressed the importance of their hopes and dreams for the future. Mothers' motivations for much of what they do are related to providing a better future for their children, and trying to become better parents themselves.

The final section of this chapter explained in detail the emergent framework of parental decision-making. The Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making is a dynamic and iterative process in which a mother's decision-making is explained by the transactions among her historical context, challenges encountered in the present moment, and predispositions for ways to act. Marked by multiple reflective and active components, the framework highlights the importance of the mothers' social and cultural embeddedness. Additionally, the framework recognizes that the mothers' decision-making processes lead to embodied actions in response to their child's behavior. Finally, the framework identifies the varying intensity and significance of active introspection or contemplation throughout the decision-making process.

In the next chapter, I situate the findings from this study in the larger context of existing literature. Additionally, I compare and contrast the emergent framework with existing theories around parenting. Finally, the limitations of this study are acknowledged, and future directions for research and/or practice are addressed.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this study, I sought to better understand how mothers of young children make decisions about everyday parenting occupations. I did not begin the research as an expert in parenting or in decision-making. My experience as an occupational therapist, and brief encounters with parents while treating children in an out-patient pediatric setting, were insufficient to answer the research questions addressed in this study. The primary purpose of this study was to understand the decision-making processes of mothers of typically developing children between the ages of 2 and 6 when faced with behavioral challenges. I began the process with a thorough literature review of the parenting literature in occupational science, developmental psychology, sociology, maternal and child health, and public health. Guided by the principles of the transactional perspective on occupation and life course sociology, I conducted 22 interviews with 12 mothers about their everyday practices and interactions with their children. Through the use of Grounded Theory methodology, I constructed a framework of the decision-making process truly grounded in the data. This framework is described in detail in Chapter 4. Findings also include the re-conceptualization of mothering as a relational role and the conditions that influence a mother's occupations (see Figure 4.1).

The known factors that influence parenting such as socio-demographic traits, parents' communication styles, and intergenerational transmission are important sensitizing concepts that guided the data collection phase of this study. This chapter will situate the findings of the study in the larger context of existing literature as well as the sensitizing concepts discussed in Chapter 2. Further, I will compare and contrast the emergent framework with existing theoretical

frameworks presented in Chapter 1 as well as parenting theories discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter also will outline the implications of this study for research and practice. Finally, the limitations of the study will be discussed, and future research directions will be outlined.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In the previous chapter, I outlined the findings from this study and highlighted that it is important to understand the mother as a whole before exploring how she makes decisions. The study's findings then focused on three aspects of the mothering process. The first is a re-conceptualization of mothering as a relational role. These findings describe the multiple occupations that a mother engages in to fulfil the roles of *caregiver*, *nurturer*, *educator*, *protector*, and *learner*. As a caregiver, the mother fulfils her child's basic needs, such as providing food and shelter. All occupations associated with fulfilling these needs such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, transporting the child to and from the bus stop or school are included within the *caregiver* role. As a nurturer, the mother provides a sense of belonging and affection towards the child. Engaging in occupations like hugging and kissing the child, expressing concern for a child when hurt, and doing things as a family, help to fulfill the mother's role as a *nurturer*. A mother also helps the child to understand right from wrong and teaches appropriate ways to act in the world. These occupations, along with teaching a child manners and appropriate skills are included within the mother's role of *educator*. Additionally, a mother's natural instinct to protect her child, whether from violence in an impoverished neighborhood, or bullying at school, is associated with her role as a *protector*. A mother may engage in occupations such as watching the child closely while he plays outdoors, or discussing issues pertaining to bullying with the child's teacher to fulfil this role. Finally, a mother is also a *learner*. Mothers are constantly evolving and maturing in the mothering process, and this can be due to their chronological age, or learning from their past experiences. Some mothers seek out

learning experiences such as asking for advice from experts, or reading books about parenting, while others simply observe other parents, or discuss parenting strategies with friends and family, to fulfil this role of a *learner*.

The second aspect of the findings is related to the conditions that influence these occupations. A mother's historical context, socio-cultural situation, and goals for the future are intricately interconnected to form the very existence of the person that she is, and the mother that she is striving to become. It is a mother's past, present, and future conditions that influence the occupations she engages in. Childhood experiences and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge influence a mother's ways of being and her thoughts and actions. Some mothers carry on intergenerational trends, such as always eating meals together as a family, while others make conscious attempts to break negative trends such as yelling at their children. Further, a mother's current situation as a whole, including but not limited to her relationship with her spouse, financial burdens, lack of sleep, or sheer lack of time, influence the manner in which she engages with her children. Finally, all mothers are motivated by a hopeful future for their children. A mother's actions in the present reflect her desire to shape a better future for her children. These include teaching a child right from wrong to "prepare him for the world" or simply providing nutritious meals to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The final aspect of the findings is the explanation of the Transactional Framework of Parental Decision-Making (TFPD). As a mother engages in parenting, she is faced with multiple scenarios where she must make decisions. These decisions can range from what to prepare for dinner to which after school activity to enroll her child in. There are also "in the moment" decisions that a mother must make when interacting with her child. The focus of this study was on those decisions that pertain to how a mother decides to respond to the child's undesirable

behavior. The emergent framework proposes that mothers' responses in diverse settings are best understood as transactional relationships among the mother's historical context, challenges encountered in the present moment, and predispositions for ways to act. The framework identifies several phases during the decision-making process. These phases include, the mother noticing a child's undesirable behavior, attempting to understand the child's motivation for the behavior, and determining whether or not the behavior needs to be addressed through intervention. Additionally, the mother uses her prior knowledge as well as factors in her environment to find an intervention that will help achieve her desired result. She then carries out this intervention through embodied action. Finally, the mother assesses her intervention, and whether or not she was successful. The framework also highlights that active introspection or *contemplation* can be present at any stage during the decision-making process, and vary in intensity. It is also important to note that given how quickly a child's behavior can occur and be corrected, this process of decision-making takes place in a matter of seconds or less. Additionally, a mother may go through this process multiple times in order to achieve the desired result.

In the following sections, each aspect of the findings is situated among the existing literature on parenting and discussed with reference to the guiding frameworks of this study.

**Mothering as a relational role.** Using the life course perspective, pathways are understood as interlocked trajectories of social roles including education, work, family, and residence that are followed by individuals and groups through society. This definition of pathways identifies the interconnected and dynamic nature of a person's role as a mother, wife, student, daughter, etc., the temporal continuity of these roles, as well as the life events that may change these roles over time. Social roles, such as mothering, are thus incorporated into



trajectories through life transitions and pathways. As such, the role of a parent is not simply defined by that social role alone. For example, a mother's demands as a student will influence the occupations she is able to engage in to fulfill the mothering role. Multiple roles in concert with each other likely produce a trajectory for the parenting role that will be different depending on the number and variety of other roles simultaneously being fulfilled.

Consistent with the concept of pathways within life course sociology, this study found that a mother fulfills multiple social roles, such as student, wife, daughter, etc. However, this study also highlights the importance of multiple interconnected roles within the role of a mother. These include the roles of *caregiver*, *nurturer*, *educator*, *protector*, and *learner* (see Figure 4.1). Some of the occupations that mothers engage in to fulfil these roles are cooking, cleaning, “kissing away the boo-boo”, helping with homework, disciplining, maintaining safety, reading parenting books, seeking advice, etc. There is considerable overlap within the occupations that a mother engages in to fulfil these roles. For example, one mother was motivated by the nutritional value of food and believed that she was nurturing and protecting her child from disease through mealtimes. In contrast, another mother believed that providing meals for the child was a simple caregiving task that fulfilled the child's basic needs. Additionally, some mothers enfold multiple roles into one occupation. For example, a mother helping her child get dressed and using that opportunity to coach the child about being kind to others at school is an example of enfolding the caregiving role with the educator role. Finally, mothers acknowledge that they are constantly trying to manage these different mothering roles, and that it is an overwhelming process. Larson's (2000) metaphorical description of motherhood as an “orchestration of occupation” resonates with this everyday reality of many mothers. Within occupational science, however,

much discussion about parenting has been associated with the description of mothering as a co-occupation.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Pierce (2003) stated, “co-occupations are the most highly interactive types of occupation, in which the occupational experiences of the individuals involved simply could not occur without the interactive responses of the other person or persons with whom the occupations are being experienced.... They are a synchronous back and forth between the occupational experiences of the individuals involved, the action of one shaping the action of the other in a close match.” (p. 199). Although the proponents of co-occupation have since acknowledged that mothering occupations need not be carried out in a face-to-face manner alone, this description is still an incomplete depiction of the mothering role in two ways. First, mothering is described here as an occupation rather than a role that is to be fulfilled by many occupations. Second, this definition relies heavily on the bidirectional influences between parent and child. The most recent descriptions of co-occupation imply that if a child lays out his/her toys on the floor in the morning, and the mother puts them away in the evening, it is still considered a co-occupation (Pierce, 2009). However, this example implies that the mothering occupation is a response to a child’s action, albeit indirectly. Based on this definition, making lunch for your child is not mothering if the child is not present during such an occupation, or if the mother was not in some way responding to the child’s action or request. This study found, however, that the role of mothering incorporates many different occupations that may or may not require an initiation by the child. Some examples include, grocery shopping, reading parenting books, observing others or seeking advice from others to make parenting decisions. It is thus more appropriate to describe mothering as a relational role instead of a co-occupation.

**Conditions influencing occupations.** While engaging in occupations that fulfil the relational role of mothering, mothers draw on many different influencing factors. These factors are associated with their past experiences, present situations, as well as motivations for the future.

The findings of this study re-affirmed the notions that parenting practices are transmitted from one generation to the next (Belsky, Jaffee, Sligo, Woodward, & Silva, 2005; Caspi & Elder, 1988; Conger, Schofield, & Neppl, 2012). While most literature in this field has been associated with the intergenerational transmission of the specific parenting practices of spanking or corporal punishment and attitudes towards the same (Bower-Russa, 2005; Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003), the current study is focused on the intergenerational transmission of everyday parental decision-making. Many mothers in this study often carried on intergenerational trends with respect to decision-making without active introspection. This finding is consistent with previous literature which shows that parents who have experienced abuse or neglect in their family of origin are more likely to exhibit negative or at-risk parenting behaviors towards their own children. However, some mothers like Amanda and Laurel, described in the previous chapter, consciously attempted to break the cycle of violence, and prevent violence or abuse in the home. While previous literature has identified factors such as financial solvency (Dixon, Browne, Hamilton-Giachrists, 2009), and presence of a nurturing partner (Jaffee et al., 2013), as those that can help break the cycle of violence, this study also found that mothers who attempted to break the cycle of violence were more insightful and introspective than mothers who did not. Additionally, mothers identified a strong emotional motivation for breaking this cycle. Often, mothers recalled being fearful of or resentful towards their parents. The mothers who made conscious decisions regarding altering their

intergenerationally transmitted maladaptive parenting behaviors were motivated by their children not having to carry the weight of negative emotions towards them into the future.

Although the importance of intergenerational continuity has been studied extensively with respect to abusive and neglectful parenting behaviors, in studying everyday parenting decision-making, the findings of this study highlight also the importance of other factors from the mother's historical context. Apart from intergenerational knowledge, mothers in this study also used their past knowledge gained through education, previous experiences with their children, or observations of others, to interact with their children in the present.

With respect to their present situation, many mothers identified that their situation as a whole impacts their decisions regarding parenting. Some of the factors that influence a mother's decision-making include inter-personal relationships and financial burden. This finding is consistent with previous research that highlights the importance of such factors as marital conflict, family stress, and socio-economic status to better understand the family situation (Benzies, Harrison, & Magill-Evans, 2004). However, the findings from this study also emphasized that mothers pay attention to perceived judgement from people in their immediate environment such as at a grocery store. There were obvious differences in the way that a mother reacted towards her child's behavior based on whether she was in public or private. Further, mothers believed that factors such as lack of sleep, the number of items on their to-do list, or constant barking or whining of a dog can influence their mood, which in turn influences how they respond in a given situation more holistically.

Further, it is important to put into context some of the findings related to perceived danger. A few mothers in the study feared for the lives of their children due the violence in their neighborhood, the color of their skin, etc. These mothers actively worked to make sure their

children do not engage in behaviors that will draw the attention of others to them. While one mother prevented her children from playing outside if she was unable to watch them closely, another emphasized teaching her children appropriate and acceptable ways to act in public. This mother believed that compliance with authority is the best strategy to prevent her children from “getting into trouble” in the future. To illustrate this example further, life course sociologists describe cumulative advantage as the idea that early advantage can be leveraged for greater gain in later life. Not only do mothers use their previous experiences to build on their current situations, but they also try to provide their children with advantages early in life so that they can be successful in the future. However, it is important to note that advantage for some means disadvantage for others. Thus, the metaphor associated with cumulative advantage/disadvantage is that there is accumulation of benefits for those already advantaged but accumulation of loss for those who are disadvantaged early (Ferraro, Shippee, & Schafer, 2009).

O’Rand (2006) suggested that the sequential process of cumulative advantage and adversity begins in infancy and childhood and accumulates as biographies diverge. Further, cumulative advantage/disadvantage hangs on two linked concepts: life course capital and life course risk. Life course capital is defined as interdependent stocks of resources across life domains that are accumulated and/or dissipated over the life course in the satisfaction of human needs and wants. For the mothers in this study, these were associated with perceived social support, ability to seek and gain knowledge about parenting, and the desire to provide a successful future for their children. On the other hand, life course risks are defined as the differential likelihoods of exposure to adverse conditions (disadvantages) or structural opportunities (advantages) for the accumulation, protection, or depletion of forms of life course capital (O’Rand, 2006). In the current study, the concept of life course risk is best exemplified by

the intergenerational transmission of maladaptive parenting behaviors, socio-economic burden, and lower parent education. Mothers rely heavily on their past experiences of being parented, as well as the resources available to them as capital or risk for their current parenting skills.

**The transactional framework of parental decision-making (TFPD).** The fields of sociology and psychology have attempted to better understand and study the family by considering it to be a thing-like entity. Some of the prominent theories within developmental psychology were Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development, family systems theory, and Sameroff's (2009) transactional perspective. The ecological model of human development posited that proximal as well as distal forces influenced a child's behavior, and thus focused on the interactions between the microsystem (like family and school), mesosystem (e.g. the relation between home and school), exosystem (e.g. the relation between home and parent's workplace), macrosystem (society and culture), and chronosystems (changes over the life course) in relation to the developing child. Unlike the interaction between the bounded categories in the ecological model, the TFPD recognizes the transactions among a mother's historical context, challenges in the present situation and the future desire to achieve successful child outcomes. Moreover, by placing the mother in the center of the model, it focuses on the mothers' perspectives on the process of decision-making rather than the individual influences on child development.

The systems theory perspective implied that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts, change in one subsystem created changes in other subsystems, and that feedback loops guided behavior (Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009). Although the influence of environmental factors was recognized, the person-environment dichotomy is still evident in much of the systems theory literature, which continues to be hierarchical and mechanistic.

Instead, the TFPD focuses on the transactional nature as well as the dynamic and interconnected realms of the family structure as a whole. In line with the transactional perspective on occupation (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006), the TFPD tries to overcome the boundaries between person and environment, and between past, present, and future.

The evolution of family theories also led scholars to develop and apply a transactional model of child development (Sameroff, 2009; Fiese, 2007). Within this transactional model, the experience of an individual would somehow change, adapt or create something new as a result of the transaction with the environment over time. Sameroff's argument was that if a change or adaptation does not take place, no transaction is taking place. However, this study found that humans are ever changing social beings. Mothers emphasized their constant and dynamic transactions with their social, cultural, physical, spatial and historical contexts in order to engage in everyday occupations. This view is more consistent with the developmental niche described by Harkness et al. (2007). The developmental niche included settings (physical and social, as well as a child's daily routine), customs (customs and habits of care), and caretaker psychology (parental ethnotheories or the values and beliefs that guide parent behavior). This study reaffirmed the idea of the developmental niche as mothers emphasized the socio-cultural embeddedness and history guiding their perspectives about parenting strategies, customs of care and values and beliefs about parenting.

Finally, to highlight the importance of social and cultural contexts, the TFPD views a mother as a whole giving equal importance to her past, present, and future conditions as the fabric of her existence. In the health sciences, the human body is considered an object or thing that can be understood through mechanics and biochemistry (Aldrich & Cutchin, 2013). In other words, the body is simply a container or vessel for the human being. In a similar way, the world

or environment is considered to be a vessel and contains these bodies within it. This separation limits the understanding of humans as active, social beings (Aldrich & Cutchin, 2013). The framework presented as a result of this study attempts to understand the mothers' as social beings, rather than simply being situated within their social context. This conceptualization is in line with Mistry and Wu's (2010) relational metatheory position that person and culture are mutually constitutive in a truly interpenetrating manner. In fact, the virtues, ideas, and imaginations that we believe to be our own creation are largely products of our enmeshment in a socio-cultural matrix (Fritz, 2012). Similar to Mistry and Wu's perspective, the TFPD recognizes that individual, family and community level constructs go beyond bidirectional influences and operate together to influence a mother's responses.

***Phases of TFPD.*** When faced with a child's undesirable behavior, a mother must make a decision regarding how to respond. During this process, mothers are typically trying to understand the child's motivation for engaging in the problem behavior. A mother's response to a behavior varies based on whether she believes that the child "doesn't know any better" or if the child may be sleepy or hungry. Mothers attempt to understand the child's perspective before deciding how they will intervene. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found that parental practices are influenced by how parents perceive their child's behavior (Benzies et al., 2004). For example, mothers may indulge in harsh parenting when the child is as young as 2 to 18 months of age, if they believe their child understands that their actions are wrong (Burchinal, Skinner, & Reznick, 2010).

Additionally, mothers' attitudes regarding problematic behavior varied and thus helped them decide whether to intervene or not. For example, one mother strongly believed that her child refusing to eat dinner was a problem due to nutritional reasons, while another believed that



a conflict during mealtime was “not worth the time and energy”. A mother’s motivation for engaging in certain parenting practices is different based on what she considers to be a problem. These variations could be due to cultural or ethnic differences which is consistent with previous research. It has been hypothesized that differences in parenting practices based on ethnicity are, in part, due to what may be considered the norm for some ethnicities (Lansford, Wager, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 2012). However, this study found that even though the strategies mothers engaged in may be different, the process they employ to decide which strategy to use still follows the phases of the decision loop described in the TFPD.

***Embodied experiences.*** The mothers in this study utilized reflective as well as active components during the decision-making processes as a response to child behavior. However, it is important to realize that the transactional perspective on occupation urges researchers to not perpetuate the mind-body dualism. As such, the findings of this study can be interpreted by describing the mothers’ decision-making processes as holistic *experiences*. John Dewey, in an attempt to alienate the false separation between person and environment, mind and body, and past, present and future, suggested that human experience is not simply a response to a stimulus but rather a response into a stimulus (Dewey, 1896/1998). By redefining the stimulus-response reflex arc concept as a circuit, Dewey referred to this process as a coordinated organization to reach a comprehensive end. The visual representation of the TFPD (Appendix G) illustrates this decision-making circuit as a mother’s attempt to achieve her desired result. The give and take or the inter-action between the child’s behavior and the mother’s response is then redefined as the coordinated transaction not only between the two of them, but also among the mother’s past, present, and future conditions. This coordination of function can be understood as the *experience*, as defined by Dewey. Experience then becomes a function of action as well as

cognition. Said another way, the idea of an action cannot be distinguished from the acting of that action. No matter how brief or “automatic” the perception of the act may be, as is the case when the mothers are making in the moment decisions, the act cannot be carried out without this perception, before, during and after the act.

***Habits of the mind.*** Habits, as conceptualized in the occupational science literature, are identified as actions that have an automatic nature, thus freeing up cognitive resources. Additionally, a transactional view of habits serves to unify individual, social and material experience (Cutchin, 2007). Habits, according to this transactional view, are not only private behavioral patterns but also heritable interpretive structures such as symbol systems, stories, beliefs, myths, metaphors, virtues, gestures, prejudices, etc. (Fesmire, 2003, pp.10) present in our subconscious mind. This view of habits is what Dewey termed habits of thought or habits of mind. More specifically, Dewey conceived habits of thought as beliefs and predispositions, such as sense of purpose in life, coping efficacy, and biases and prejudices etc. (Clark, 2000). The mothers in the study acknowledge that most of their decision-making is likely happening on a subconscious level and being influenced by factors that are out of their control such as their past experiences, their beliefs, and their predispositions. Mothers in this study thus employed habits of mind as well as action to embody social and cultural norms, beliefs, values, etc., thus providing me with a well-rounded understanding of their unified experiences as parents.

***Contemplation.*** The findings of this study describe mothers’ contemplation of the decision-making process, and how that contemplation can vary in intensity. A similar idea is relayed in Dewey’s distinction between two types of reflection (Dewey, 1916/2001). Engaging in an experience can either be done with a trial and error philosophy, which would employ primary experience, or can be achieved by analyzing cause and effect through deep reflection. Mothers

tend to employ both of these reflection strategies during decision-making, depending on the situation as a whole. While the trial and error approach can be described as the primary experience of the mothers' decision-making processes, the thorough analysis or deep reflection is a distinct experience in itself, that is, the secondary experience. Dewey (1916/2001, pp.151) states "thinking is the intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous". In essence, experience is a function of action or doing as well as cognition. For the mothers in this study, not only do primary experiences allow them to engage in the decision-making process, but the secondary experiences allow them to deeply reflect upon it in order to perfect it.

**Summary.** A mother relies heavily on her predispositions to think and act to execute an intervention. Mothers reported that when preparing to intervene they may actively consider what has worked in a similar situation in the past. They are also aware of strategies that have not worked in the past so may employ some trial and error techniques, such as primary experiences described above. However, the mothers also acknowledge that most of the preparation is likely happening on a subconscious level. Typically, the mother uses a set of preexisting dispositions to think and act for the preparation of intervention. These predispositions are embedded within the mother's behavioral repertoires and have become habits. Habits, considered as the building blocks of occupations, are considered as the acquired predispositions or ways to respond to situations (Cutchin & Dickie, 2012). Habits are both the product of our entwinement with our environments and the tools that we have at our disposal to coordinate with the environment to maintain stability and experience growth (Fritz, 2012). Through the use of habits and habit repertoires, mothers "functionally coordinate" with their environments when "problematic situations arise" with their children. The acquisition of habits has been linked to the co-

constitutive nature of person and culture. This co-constitution is evident in the TFPD by understanding the mother's situation as a whole while she progresses through the decision loop. In other words, historical as well as socio-cultural influences are at the core of parental decision-making strategies.

### **Models of Parenting Children with Behavior Challenges**

According to the model of coercive parenting described by Patterson, disruptive parenting practices act as a proximal mechanism for children to exhibit behavior problems (Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998). In contrast, in applying the concept of cumulative advantage/disadvantage to temper tantrums in children, Caspi, Elder, & Bem (1987) concluded that if behavior is largely sustained by its consequences, then adaptive or maladaptive behaviors should show continuity almost by definition. In other words, the persistence of maladaptive behaviors across time and circumstances is a result of interactions between the child and his/her environment. They defined interaction as "the reciprocal, dynamic transaction between the person and the environment: The person acts, the environment reacts, and the person reacts back" (pp. 308). This definition is similar to the transactional perspective on occupation as well as the findings of this study. The TFPD implies that the socio-cultural and historical contexts of a child and parent have key roles in sustaining adaptive as well as maladaptive behaviors. For example, a child whose temper tantrum coerces a mother into providing short-term payoffs in the immediate situation, such as distracting the child with an electronic device, may thereby learn a behavioral style that continues to "work" in similar ways at a later time. This immediate reinforcement short-circuits the learning of more controlled interactional styles that might have greater adaptability in the long run. When this habitual reinforcement loses its effectiveness, for example, if this strategy worked for an older child but not for the younger one, a mother is compelled to search for a more effective strategy either through trial and error, or

more structured learning. In other words, the mother may move through the TFPD decision-loop several times to achieve the desired result.

**Social information processing.** In an attempt to study aggressive behaviors in children, Dodge and Crick (1990) outlined the social information processing model. They believed that individuals interpret social cues, make decisions about how to respond to those cues, and then act accordingly. For aggressive children, they concluded that more often than not, a violent response was enacted due to the inaccurate interpretation of the social stimulus. Although used to study child aggressive behavior, the social information processing model has been applied to other human behavior as well. For example, Azar, Reitz, and Goslin (2008) believed that parents employ the social information processing model to make active decisions about how to respond to a child's behavior. These authors believe that cognitive flexibility, planning and thinking are important aspects of the parenting process. This is consistent with the TFPD, in that it emphasizes not only the active elements of decision-making but also the thoughtful, introspective elements. However, Azar et al. argued that had parenting been simply instinctive or a conditioned response to routines, then parent training and education would not work. The findings of this study suggest that many aspects of parenting and parental decision-making are in fact instinctive and automatic responses due to habits of mind. This contradiction may imply that the reason parent training strategies are effective is because they bring these sub-conscious, background habits of mind to the forefront. These parent education efforts compel parents to actively introspect about the motivations behind their behaviors in order to change them effectively.

## **Implications for Research and Practice**

The findings from this study add to the occupational science scholarship in three ways. First, the focus of this study was on process oriented research, which is missing from occupational science inquiry. The parenting and family research within occupational science has primarily focused on description rather than process. For instance, studies have described the mealtime and bedtime routines of families, particularly those of children with disabilities, with very few that focus on the typically developing population. In fact, the family occupations of children with behavior challenges is absent from the occupational science literature. This study, focused on typical children, emphasizes the parent-child relationship as a transactional process rather than describing it as a bidirectional interaction. The application of the parental decision-making model to occupations of diverse families will steer the discipline towards a holistic understanding of family occupations as well as the motivations behind engaging in said occupations.

Second, the findings from this study help us understand family processes from a transactional perspective. Although the mode of data collection was individual interviews, the focus was on the social and cultural situatedness of families. Guided by the life course perspective, the study's findings recognize the importance of mothers' historical context, present situational challenges and future trajectories in every day decision-making processes. Third, by using a grounded theory approach to explore parental decision-making, a conceptual framework was constructed that is truly grounded in the data. Occupational scientists have not spent much time and energy on theory building within the discipline and this has forced scholars to borrow and fall back on extra-disciplinary theories to explain complex social phenomena such as parenting. Thus, theory construction will help the discipline to stay close to concepts that are unique to occupational science while still moving the discipline forward.

Additionally, this research provides several implications for practice. First, the decision-making processes mothers employ to negotiate the everyday parent-child interactions reveal how these mundane situations can lead to either adaptive or maladaptive parent-child interactions. Second, understanding the degree to which parents of children with behavior problems use intergenerational knowledge to manage the “everyday” parent-child conflicts can provide an opportunity for early intervention. Third, identification of situational influencing factors related to a mother’s past, present and future conditions, provides a better understanding of the holistic nature and behavior of families. Fourth, these findings are expected to increase the understanding of the processes involved in everyday parent and child interactions, ultimately leading to prevention of maladaptive parent-child interactions and reduced clinical levels of children’s challenging behaviors. Finally, the visual representation of the TFPD illustrates the optimal decision-making process that can be employed in practice settings (see Appendix G). This model can serve as a tool for practitioners for making changes in the decision-making strategies of parents in order to achieve better outcomes for parent-child interactions and to prevent maladaptive parent-child interactions.

### **Future Research**

The goal of grounded theory methodology is to construct theoretical frameworks truly grounded in the data. These frameworks often begin with substantive theories. The application of substantive theories to multiple contexts and populations leads to the construction of more formal theories. The framework constructed from the data collected in this study can be applied in several different ways in order to construct a formal theory of parental decision-making. First, the TFPD used only interview data from mothers. The next step could be to collect data that captures many different perspectives of many different roles. For example, intergenerational or multigenerational studies could likely highlight an individual’s parenting role as well as

offspring role. In addition, when multiple generations reside in the same household, the collection of data from each of these generations can also highlight the dynamics of the family holistically. Similarly, other modes of data collection such as observations, journals, and time diaries could be helpful in better understanding mothers' processes of decision-making. Second, this study focused primarily on mothers as the primary caregivers. Due to the growing diversity in the understanding of families, more fathers, grandparents, aunts/uncles, and siblings are responsible for caregiving tasks. The application of the TFPD with other types of caregivers would also be a step towards the construction of formal theories. Next, this model was constructed using data from mothers that are parenting typically developing children between the ages of 2 and 6. Applying the model to older children and/or children with disabilities will increase the transferability of the findings. In addition, applying the model to parents with disabilities will also provide an added level of complexity and transferability to the results of this study. Finally, this model has been constructed in relation to mothers' decision-making regarding everyday parenting when children exhibit behavior problems. Expanding this model to other types of decisions, such as medical decisions, school choice, etc., will also move the process towards a more formal theory forward.

## **Limitations**

As a novice researcher and doctoral student, my aim for this study was to maintain reflexivity and relationality (Hall & Callery, 2001) throughout the research process. Reflexivity was maintained by writing reflective and analytic memos that enabled me to acknowledge constantly that data is socially constructed. Relationality refers to power dynamics and expectations between researcher and participant, with an emphasis on reciprocity and equity. I was able to maintain relationality by dressing appropriately but not extravagantly, avoiding



professional jargon in communications, and making every attempt to demonstrate active listening skills to make participants feel comfortable.

Even though this study addressed many of the gaps in the current literature, several limitations of the study must be acknowledged. First, although this study aimed to understand the historical and socio-cultural influences impacting parental decision-making processes, only a single mode of data collection was employed, i.e. interviews with the mothers. Future studies would benefit from multiple interview sources, as well as observations. Second, in the interest of time, half the interview audio files were transcribed using a transcription service, instead of being transcribed by me as the lead researcher. It can be argued that there was a risk of losing subtle information regarding tone and emotionality by doing this. In order to prevent any loss of valuable analytic leads, I read the professionally transcribed interviews while listening to the audio recordings to check for accuracy. Notable moments of long pause, changes in tone, and changes in emotional state were also identified.

Further, the study is concentrated on children ages 2 to 6. Since parenting is a process that changes over time, examining this model's application to adolescents or other periods in children's development is an important next step for future research. It is also important to acknowledge that even though theoretical saturation was achieved, the sample size for the study was relatively small ( $n = 12$ ) for theory construction. This was offset by interviewing the mothers twice, thus leading to a total of 22 data points for analysis. Additionally, it is important to recognize a selection bias in my sample. It is possible that mothers that volunteered for the study considered themselves to be good parents, and thus were willing and able to participate. Finally, it is noteworthy that I was dealing with large amounts of sensitive qualitative data, as a single student researcher. My personal beliefs and preconceptions may have influenced the construction

of the emergent framework. To maintain trustworthiness and transparency, methods for maintaining rigor have been described in Chapter 3. These methods were largely aided by the use of extensive reflective and analytical memos outlining analytical and theoretical decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Inspired by symbolic interactionism and the pragmatist traditions of John Dewey, some occupational scientists have critiqued the emphasis on individualism (Dickie et al., 2006) and have proposed a transactional perspective of occupation. As a sociological perspective, symbolic interactionism considers individuals to be co-constructors within society. That is, people interpret their world from others' responses to their actions and based on those interpretations, they act again (Nayar, 2012). The mothers in the study are trying every day to interpret the actions of their children, and respond in order to prepare their children for the future. Nicole said,

The manner in which you just sort of behave as a parent I think comes back more to how you were raised... Underlying that is... how you want your kids to turn out... it just really comes back to kindness. That's the best word for it I would say, is that we want our kids to be kind... just seeing what's happening to our society and our world and feeling like... they can learn all these other things but even the smartest kid, if they haven't learned to be compassionate and kind, they'll never learn that. We are the people that teach them that. They can learn stuff at school but if they don't learn that at home then they're never going to learn it.

This quote illustrates that mothers use their past experiences and knowledge of current events in an attempt to shape their children's futures. All decisions that mothers make regarding how they respond to their child are influenced by these past, present and future conditions. Through the use of habits and habit repertoires which have been acquired through their oneness with culture, mothers "functionally coordinate" with their environments when "problematic situations arise" with their children. As a result, historical and socio-cultural influences on everyday parenting occupations must be considered when trying to understand families and their decision-making processes.

## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM (APPROVED BY UNC IRB)**

### **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Consent to Participate in a Research Study Adult Participants**

**Consent Form Version Date:** 09-13-2015

**IRB Study #** 15-0425

**Title of Study:** Parental Decision-Making Processes: Historical and socio-cultural influences on everyday parenting occupations

**Principal Investigator:** Chetna Sethi

**Principal Investigator Department:** Allied Health - Occupational Therapy

**Principal Investigator Phone number:** (757) 933-1326

**Principal Investigator Email Address:** chetna\_sethi@med.unc.edu

**Faculty Advisor:** Brian Boyd

**Faculty Advisor Contact Information:** (919) 843-4465

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#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research study is to understand the decisions that parents make regarding everyday parent and child interactions. The goal is to understand the degree to which parents of young children use intergenerational knowledge (i.e., knowledge transmitted from their own parents / childhood experiences) to manage the everyday, routine parent-child interactions. In addition, the study seeks to understand other factors within your environment that influence this everyday decision-making including but not limited to support of other family members, church, friends or neighbors; safety of the neighborhood; perceptions about parenting; etc.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are the mother and primary caregiver of at least one child between the ages of 2 and 6.

**Are there any reasons you should not be in this study?**

You should not be in this study if you are under 18 years of age. You should also not be in this study if you have one or more children with any physical or mental disability.

**How many people will take part in this study?**

A total of approximately 20 people will take part in this study.

**How long will your part in this study last?**

Participation in this study involves 2 interviews about two weeks apart. The first interview is expected to last approximately 60 minutes and the second interview approximately 45 minutes.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

The interviews will be conducted at the location of your choosing and at a time convenient to you. You have the right to stop the interview at any time and you can choose not to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering. With your permission (see below), the interviews will be audio-recorded. You have the right to ask the audio recording to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

\_\_\_\_\_ OK to audio record me during the study

\_\_\_\_\_ NOT OK to audio record me during the study

**What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You will not benefit personally from being in this research study.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

**What if we learn about new findings or information during the study?**

You will be given any new information gained during the course of the study that might affect your willingness to continue your participation. ***Any observation of abuse or neglect will be reported to child protective services immediately.***

**How will information about you be protected?**

Interview recordings will be stored on encrypted hard drives and will be kept separate from any identifying information. The principle investigator and members of the dissertation committee will be the only people with access to identifiable data. After the data have been analyzed, the audio recordings will be destroyed at the earliest possible time.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could

be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, child protective services) for purposes such as quality control or safety.

**What will happen if you are injured by this research?**

All research involves a chance that something bad might happen to you. This may include the risk of personal injury or discomfort. If such problems occur, the researcher will help you get counseling, but any costs for the counseling will be billed to you and/or your insurance company. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has not set aside funds to pay you for any such injuries or discomfort, or for the related medical care. You do not give up any of your legal rights by signing this form.

**What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete?**

You can withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. The investigator also has the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**

You will be receiving \$50 for taking part in this study. This will be paid as a \$25 gift card after participating in any part of the first interview and another \$25 gift card after participating in any part of the second interview.

You will be reimbursed if you are able to complete any part of the interview (either first or second), even if not completed in its entirety. If for some reason however, you are unable to participate in the second interview, you will not be reimbursed for that interview.

**Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions about the study (including payments), complaints, concerns, or if a research-related injury occurs, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu).

**Participant's Agreement:**

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

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Signature of Research Participant

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Date

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Printed Name of Research Participant

---

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

---

Date

---

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

## **APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### Interview 1

#### Icebreakers

1. Tell me about your family
2. Tell me about a time when your child made you smile/laugh

#### Initial Open-ended Questions

1. Tell me about a time when your child lost his/her temper
2. When, if at all, did you first notice it?
3. What do you think contributed to your child's behavior?
4. What was going on in your mind then?
5. How did you respond?

#### Intermediate Open-ended Questions

6. How did you decide how you would respond?
7. Who, if anyone, influenced some of the decisions or choices you make as a parent? Tell me about how he/she or they influenced you.
8. Could you describe a situation similar to this when you were growing up? Was there a time growing up when you (or a sibling) acted the same way?
9. [If so,] what was it like? How did your parent/caregiver respond?

#### Final Open-ended Questions

10. How much do you think your experiences as a child influence your actions with your own child (if at all)?
11. Were there any other factors involved in your response to your own child?
12. [If so,] could you describe them?

## Ending Questions

13. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand that situation better?

14. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

## Interview 2

### Initial questions

1. As you think back to our last conversation, are there any other moments that stand out in your mind?
2. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this time period?

### Intermediate questions

3. Were there any other factors involved in your response to your own child?
4. If so, could you describe them?

### Ending questions

5. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand that situation better?
6. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
7. Would it be alright for me to contact you in case I have any follow-up questions?



## APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLIER

 <p>Parental Decision-Making</p>	
<p>A Research Study</p>	<p>Are you the mother and primary caregiver of a child between the age of 2 and 6?</p>
	<p>We want to hear from you!</p> <p>The purpose of this research study is to understand how mothers make decisions about parenting.</p> <p>Participation entails two 90-minute interviews over the course of two weeks.</p> <p><b>Please contact:</b> <b>Chetna Sethi</b> <b>University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill</b> <b><a href="mailto:chetna_sethi@med.unc.edu">chetna_sethi@med.unc.edu</a></b> <b>757-933-1326</b></p> <p>Participants will receive \$50 compensation for study completion.</p>

## APPENDIX D: CAREGIVER & CHILD DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

1. What is today's date (mm/dd/yyyy)? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_
2. What is your child's age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your child's racial background (check one)?
  - ☐ African American/Black
  - ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
  - ☐ Caucasian/White
  - ☐ Native American/American Indian
  - ☐ Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Is your child Hispanic or Latino? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. What is your child's sex (check one)? ☐ M ☐ F
6. What is your racial background (check one)?
  - ☐ African American/Black
  - ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
  - ☐ Caucasian/White
  - ☐ Native American/American Indian
  - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
  - ☐ Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your sex? (check one): ☐ M ☐ F
8. What is your age (check one)?
  - ☐ 18 – 25
  - ☐ 26 – 35
  - ☐ 36 – 45
  - ☐ 46 – 55
  - ☐ Over 55
  - ☐ I would prefer not to say
9. What is the highest level of education that you have completed (check one)?
  - ☐ Less than a high school degree
  - ☐ High school diploma
  - ☐ Bachelor's degree
  - ☐ Doctoral degree
  - ☐ GED
  - ☐ Associates degree
  - ☐ Master's degree
  - ☐ Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
10. How many adults live in your home? \_\_\_\_\_  
(note: include yourself, but do not include your adult children who are over the age of 18 in this number)

11. How many children (under the age of 18) live in your home? \_\_\_\_\_  
(note: include your preschooler in this number)

12. What is your Annual Household Income (check one)?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$15,000  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 - \$24,999       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 - \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$99,999       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than \$100,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> I would prefer not to say |

## APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF REFLECTIVE MEMO

Memo #7

8/15/16

Are the moms telling me what I want to hear? I remember Margie Sandelowski telling us to pay attention to peoples' words. Are they saying, "*you* do this because *you* bla bla bla.." or are they saying, "*I* did this because *I* bla bla bla.." It makes a difference because the former implies their beliefs about how the world ought to be and the latter is what they actually do. I am after the latter, but two of my participants have answered questions in the general sense already. Can I change my questions in a way to get at the latter better?

It seemed like JG was a little more open and specific about her practices in her second interview. She gave me more "I" statements than in the first interview, maybe because she felt more comfortable with me the second time. Maybe, I should use the first interview, or at least the first part of the first interview to ask some general questions about what being a parent means to them, or something that will get at their parenting philosophy. This may give them the opportunity to directly answer in the general sense, and then when I ask the specific questions, they will know the difference.

## **APPENDIX F: EXAMPLE OF ANALYTIC MEMO**

Memo #19

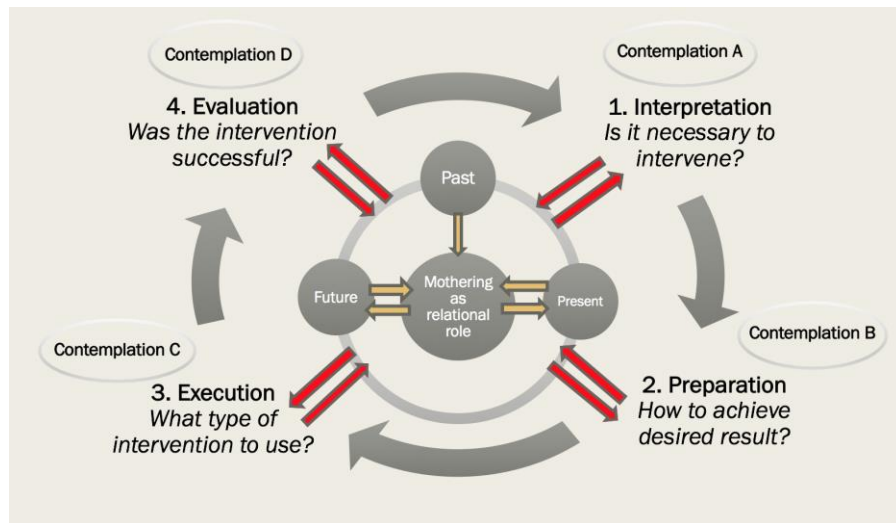
10/26/16

One of the consistent themes I have been able to gauge so far is that there is an element of the unknown and therefore the element of uncertainty and also of reacting without thinking. “In the moment you don’t think” type of statements. So, I’m trying to study the process of decision-making but how much of this process is conscious decision-making, versus falling back on your habit patterns? Must pursue “Habits of Mind” lead. It seems the mother uses a set of preexisting dispositions to figure out what intervention to use. A lot of these dispositions are related to the mother’s own childhood experiences. These predispositions are embedded within the mother’s behavioral repertoires and have become habits. Mothers may tend to fall back on these habits instead of actively thinking about what to do. So, thoughts and actions that are both being undertaken to prepare for executing an intervention depending on their past experiences. Some mothers do actively consider what has worked in a similar situation in the past and she is also aware of strategies that have not worked in the past so maybe employing some trial and error techniques (?) But, the mothers also acknowledge that most of this is likely happening on a subconscious level. So, when does this active introspection happen versus not? And why?

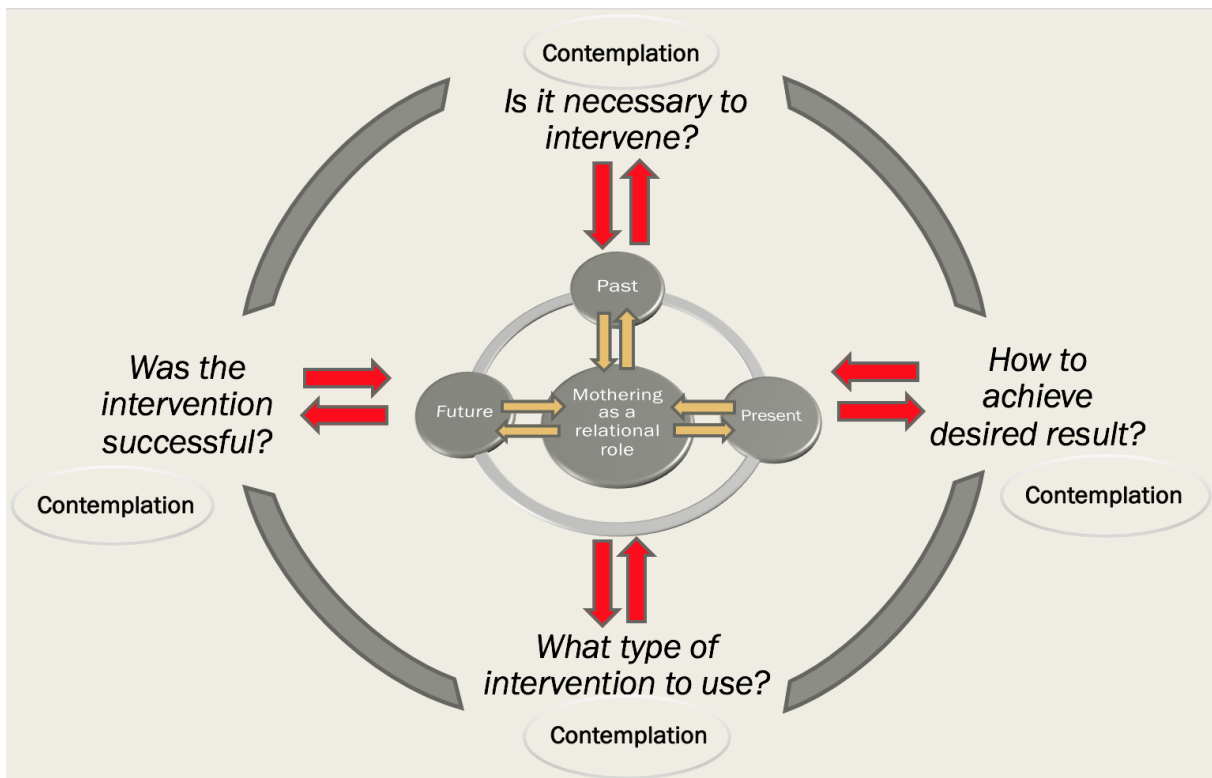
After transcribing and coding the next two interviews, I think I need to start asking more pointedly about this. How much of this is in the moment without really thinking versus how much of it is, “let me think about this before I react”?

## APPENDIX G: TRANSACTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF PARENTAL DECISION-MAKING

Version 1: Earlier iteration



Version 2: Revised March 29, 2017



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